A PRIMER OF HINDUISM

D. S. SARMA



BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY - 400 007

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By
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1984
BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN
Kulapati Munshi Marg,
Bombay-400 007

First Revised Edition, 1984

Price : Rs. 25/-

PRINTED IN INDIA

By V. Varadarajan at Associated Advertisers and Printers, 505, Tardeo Arthur Road, Bombay–400034, and Published by S. Ramakrishnan, Executive Secretary, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Bombay–400007

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan has pleasure in bringing out a new edition of the book "A Primer of Hinduism" by the late Prof. D. S. Sarma, educationist and a scholar of great repute. Earlier, the Bhavan had the privilege of publishing his well-known book "Essence of Hinduism" which has gone into three editions, including one by The Ramakrishna Centre, Natal, South Africa.

In this book, Prof. Sarma, in his inimitable style, takes you through the vicissitudes Hinduism has passed through during its long history of thousands of years. In simple language, which can be understood by even school-going children, Prof. Sarma delineates the basic philosophy which has moulded Hinduism and Hindu thought down the ages.

He begins the book in the form of a dialogue between father and daughter and takes you stage by stage through the evolution of Hinduism. In this comparatively small book of 120 pages, Prof. Sarma lucidly explains how the fundamental tenets of Hinduism have their base in the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and the Puranas.

In the Tables at the end, he shows the rise and decline of the Vedic Dharma in the lives of the people and its revival at the hands of great men, right from the Vedic Age till the national awakening in the early years of the 20th century, ushered in by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda.

Owing to various factors beyond our control the book could not be taken up for publication so far, though the author left the Mss. with us more than a decade ago.

It is our fervent hope that every school boy and girl will have occasion to go through this masterpiece in delineating Hindu philosophy from the pen of one who all through his life was a staunch devotee of Hinduism and lived like a true Hindu.

—THE PUBLISHERS

Bombay,
24th April, 1984.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION : OUR GUIDES

I

DAUGHTER : Father, are you free now ?

FATHER : Yes, my child. What do you want ?

D : Father, you promised that if I should pass the *Gita* examination held by the Rajahmundry Hindu Samaj, you would teach me the essentials of Hinduism. Now that I have passed it and also got a prize, you should redeem your promise.

F : You have passed only the lower examination. Attempt the higher when you go to the sixth form next year and pass it. Then I will teach you. But when once you know your *Gita* thoroughly, you don't require any further teaching. All the essentials of Hinduism are there.

D : But it is so confusing to me, father. In some places it teaches *Karma-Yoga* and in others *Karma-Sannyasa*. I am not able to make it out.

F : All the same you have passed your examination.

D : They asked us very simple questions, and I was able to answer them fairly well from what you were telling us in the prayer classes in the morning. But the higher examination will be difficult. I am told it requires a general knowledge of Hinduism. So if you teach me the essentials of our religion, I will sit for the higher examination next year.

F : But what do I know of Hinduism, my child ? Mine is a layman's knowledge picked up in a haphazard way from books. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa once said that a

teacher who undertakes to teach religion from mere book-knowledge is like a man who undertakes to describe Benares, having seen only a map of the sacred city. A qualified teacher should have both religious knowledge and religious experience. These are the two eyes of religion. I have only one eye, and it is partially blind.

D : But even a one-eyed man can indicate the way to a blind man. It is only when the blind lead the blind that both fall into the ditch. If you have one eye, I have none. If you are partially blind, I am totally blind. And, father, you have frequently deplored that the education we are getting in our schools and colleges is very defective, "as it has no religious background." Those are your very words.

F : Yes. It is a great pity that the education, which the Hindu children are getting now, has no reference to the Hindu view of life or Hindu ideals. That is why it is so barren of results.

D : What are the results which would otherwise be attained ?

F : The results of a complete system of education are a spiritual outlook on life, a sterling character, graceful manners, a virile mind and a humane spirit—all these, of course, having their basis in a sound and vigorous body. Mere intellectual education cannot give you all these. So I have always held that the education that is given in our schools and colleges should be supplemented by some kind of moral and religious instruction at home.

D : And yet whenever I come and ask you to teach me the principles of our religion you put me off with some excuse or other.

F : It is really the duty of the priest and not of the parent. The latter may not always be competent to teach religion. But unfortunately we have no organised priesthood. Our priests only officiate in ceremonies. They do not teach.

Their emoluments are ridiculously low, and depend upon the whim of the householder. They are not properly trained for the sacred task of maintaining our religious traditions in their original purity and vigour.

D : So it is all the greater reason that parents, who know something of their religion, should teach their children. But it is unlucky to have parents who are teachers by profession.

F : Why, my dear ?

D : Because you teachers have time only to teach others' children, never your own.

F : Well, I have no objection, my child, to teach you what I know, If you are so anxious to learn. But how shall we proceed ? If I proceed to give you a long account of the essentials of Hinduism, I am sure you will soon be tired. Suppose you put me some questions every day and I try to answer them. Would that method suit you ?

D : I don't know what questions to put. But I have no objection to this method, if after one or two questions, you suggest to me further questions by means of your answers.

F : I will try.

D : And, as you are free now, may I begin at once ?

F : Yes. But one word of caution !

D : What is it ?

F : You should bear in mind that religion is solid food rather hard to digest. It is not like the novels, dramas, short stories and moral tales for girls that you are so fond of devouring as soon as you come back from school. Your mother tells me that you are called the Punjab Express for your speed. How many pages do you read a day ?

D : One thousand five hundred ! That is the best answer I can give.

F : Well, don't lose your temper. If you want really to understand religion you have to reduce your speed very considerably.

D : And move like the goods train ?

F : Even more slowly than that.

D : Like a double-bullock-cart ?

F : Yes, when the driver is sleeping.

D : That is, come to a standstill ?

F : Exactly. You have frequently to pause and think. There is no use of your skimming through ten books in one month. It is better to read one book ten times in the same period.

D : Thanks very much for your advice. I suppose all the books that you read deserve to be read ten times.

F : I am not speaking of all books. I am now speaking only of important religious books.

D : But I have not submitted to you now any ambitious scheme of reading religious books. You wanted me to put some questions on Hinduism and promised to answer them. But, before I began, you said you would give me one word of caution, and instead gave me more than fifty words of advice on a subject which is not at all relevant. And now you laugh !

F : I must laugh at my little toy of a Punjab Express when it dashes off at full speed. But I am an old hand at this game.

D : What game, Mr. Oldhand ? Your mixed metaphors are delightful.

F : The game of employing fun when you cannot employ argument.

D : O, you are referring, I suppose, to your calling me the Punjab Express instead of meeting my argument.

F : No, no. I am referring to your taking my "one word of caution" literally and objecting to my fifty words of advice. Well, seriously, my child, my advice is not so irrelevant to the subject on hand as you suppose. Our subject is religion. And what I want you to bear in mind in our talks on religion is that you should not be in a hurry, that you should calmly think over what I say and that you should bring all your powers of reflection to bear on the discussion. Take plenty of time. We will meet for this purpose only once a week from to-day.

D : Very well, father. And don't hesitate to reprimand me when I forget myself.

F : I don't think there will be any need for it, my child. You may begin now.

II

D : First of all, who is the founder of Hinduism? We read that Buddhism was founded by Buddha, Christianity by Christ, and Muhammadanism by Muhammad. But who founded Hinduism?

F : It is one of the distinctive features of Hinduism that it has no founder. It does not depend for its authority on the life-history of any man.

D : What is its authority then?

F : Its authority is Eternal Truth itself to which every man's spiritual experience can bear witness.

D : I have no spiritual experience of any kind. How am I to know the Eternal Truth?

F : As the spiritual experience of almost all men is imperfect, Truth revealed itself in this land through the minds of great *Rishis*. And this revelation is embodied in the *Sruti*.

D : What is *Sruti*?

F : *Sruti* literally means what is heard. Great Rishis that had perfected themselves by long Tapas are said to have heard in their hearts eternal truths and to have left a record of them in our sacred books.

D : What are these sacred books?

F : They are called the Vedas—the Rgveda, the Sama-veda, the Yajur-veda and the Atharvana-veda.

D : Are the Vedas then the authorities for Hinduism?

F : Yes. The Vedas claim to teach a man the highest truths that he can know and to lead him to his highest good. They are, therefore, supremely authoritative. And as Truth is eternal, the Vedas that have revealed it to the Hindus are also considered by them to be eternal.

D : What do the Vedas consist of ?

F : Each Veda consists of three parts—(*i*) the *Mantra* or hymns, (*ii*) the *Brahmanas* or explanatory treatises on *mantras* and rituals and (*iii*) the *Upanishads* or mystic treatises revealing the most profound spiritual truths and suggesting the ways of realising them.

D : Are all these parts equally important ? Is every word of the Veda sacred ?

F : Will you tell me whether each rose plant is equally alive from the root to the flower ? Without the root, the stem, the leaves and even the thorns how can we have the flower ? The *Upanishad* is the rose, and it grows naturally out of the Vedic hymns and sacrifices. It is the most important part of the Veda.

D : So we have four *Upanishads* for the four Vedas ?

F : No. Each Veda contains many *Upanishads.*

D : How many *Upanishads* have we then on the whole ?

F : The *Upanishads* are many in number. But the most important of them are twelve.

D : What are they ?

F : They are—Isa, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Aitareya, Taittiriya. Chandogya, Brhadranyaka, Kausitki and Svetasvatara.

D : Why are these considered the most important ?

F : Because they contain the highest truths known to Hindusim.

D : Are these the only authorities for Hinduism ?

F : The *Sruti* is, of course, the primary authoiity. But we have a number of secondary authorities based on the *Sruti.* Of these first comes the *Smrti.*

D : What does the *Smrti* consist of ?

F : The *Smrti* consist of admittedly human compositions, the object of which is to regulate personal and social life and to bring into existence institutions embodying the principles of the *Sruti.* Therefore, the laws for regulating Hindu society from time to time are codified in the *Smrti.*

D : Do the laws change from time to time ?

F : Yes. The *Rishis* who guide Hindu society from age to age make the necessary alterations in the laws according to the needs of the time.

D : So does Hinduism allow the introduction of new laws ?

F : Most certainly it does. It allows not only the introduction of new laws but also the production of new scriptures. Else it would be a dead religion.

D : Who are the most important lawgivers of the past ?

F : The most important Hindu lawgivers are Manu, Yajnavalkya and Parasara.

D : What are the subjects they deal with in their codes ?

F : They deal with the *Dharma* or the duty of the various classes of citizens. Hence their law books are known as *Dharma-Sastras.* They give detailed instructions regarding the duties of a man according to his class and station in life. They also describe the duties of kings, the administration of civil and criminal law, the sanitary measures adopted in ancient times and the penances prescribed for various sins.

D : Is our society strictly bound to follow these instructions now ?

F : I have already said that laws change from time to time. Social and political institutions grow, men's ideas

change, and new factors are introduced into national life. Then some of the old laws become obsolete and new conventions arise, which, in course of time under the lead of great *Rishis*, come to be established as laws. Hindu society has ever been a living organism and its codes of laws always flexible.

D : Is it a living organism now ?

F : It is. It has survived many foreign invasions. It has seen many empires rise and fall. It is as strong to-day as when Alexander the Great invaded India.

D : But are its codes now flexible ?

F : Hindu society is slowly adjusting itself to the needs of the present time. Only these adjustments are not properly codified and made authoritative. The real test of life in any organism lies in the response it gives to the environment. If our society at any time fails to respond to the needs of the hour, if it fails to follow the lead of its living sages, and if it has not the imagination and the courage to march on and give a new embodiment to the eternal principles of unity, brotherhood and love declared by the *Sruti*, it will surely perish, and Hindus will go the way of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

D : So the laws of the *Smrti* are entirely subordinate to the eternal principles of the *Sruti* ?

F : Yes. The relation of the *Smrti* to the *Sruti* is similar to that of the body to the soul. The body grows. It decays and dies. It is subject to the time-process, while the soul is not. The latter is beyond time.

D : What are the other secondary authorities besides the *Smrti* ?

F : Next to the *Smrtis* or the codes of law, we have the *Itihasas*, the *Puranas*, the *Agamas* and the *Darsanas*. Let me tell you, in passing, that sometimes the word *Smrti* is used

in a wider sense, so as to include all these secondary scriptures.

D : Are these also subject to change ?

F : Yes, If the *Sruti* is the soul and the *Smrti* is the body. these are only organs and limbs .

D : What are *Itihasas* ? And what is their object ?

F : The *Itihasas* are the two well-known epics—the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Their object is to drive home to the popular mind, by means of history and legend, the principles of the Veda and the laws of the *Smrti*. The great types of character that we find in these books have firmly established the *Hindu Dharma* in the mind of our nation.

D : So do they form a sort of popular Veda ?

F : Exactly. The *Sruti*, on account of the elaborate rituals and the long courses of discipline it prescribes, could only be for the few. But the Epics and the Puranas, which are only popular renderings of the Vedic truths, are for all. Almost all Hindus get their earliest religious notions from the stories in the popular Veda. Have you not read these stories ?

D : Yes, father, I have. So Valmiki and Vyasa, the authors of the two epics, have to be looked upon as the *Rishis* who have popularised the teachings of the Veda ?

F : Yes. Moreover they are great nation-builders. Hindu society is still following the lines chalked out by them. The characters they have created in the epics are more real to us than those in actual life. Every Hindu child knows that Rama is an ideal king, and that Sita is an ideal wife according to Hindu conceptions, and that Lakshmana and Hanuman represent the Hindu ideals of loyalty, devotion and discipline.

D : And what about the characters in the *Mahabharata*?

F : The *Mahabharata* is primarily an encyclopaedia of *Hindu Dharma.* It consists of long stories, episodes, dialogues, discourses and sermons. However, the divine figure of Sri Krishna dominates the whole. He holds all the strings of action. He is represented both as a great teacher and a man of action. Next to him come the five Pandavas, headed by Yudhishtira who is the very embodiment of *Hindu Dharma* in peace and war. Another great character who is an authority on *Hindu Dharma* is the old warrior Bhishma. His lengthy discourses in *Santiparva* are justly famous.

D : But is not the *Bhagavad Gita* the most important discourse on *Hindu Dharma* in this epic ?

F : Undoubtedly it is.

D : What is its importance due to ?

F : Its importance is due both to its context and its contents. Firstly, you know it occurs just before the momentous battle between the Pandavas and Kauravas on the field of Kurukshetra. The discourse between Krishna and Arjuna is placed at the very focus of the great epic— the point towards which the actions of all the characters tend and from which their subsequent fates diverge. At the critical moment, when Arjuna saw his dear kinsmen ranged against him in the battle, he grew faint of heart and was tempted to relinquish his duty as a soldier. If he had done so, there would have been an end of the war, and the evil embodied in Duryodhana and his allies would have secured a triumph. But the calamity was averted by Krishna. He came to the rescue of Arjuna, discussed with him the moral and metaphysical implications of all human duties, solved his difficulties and made him do the work before him in a dispassionate and fearless manner. Secondly, the *Gita* gives in a nutshell all the philosophical and the ethical teachings of the *Upanishads*. There is a well-known verse which compares the *Upanishads* to cows, the *Gita* to milk, Krishna to a cowherd and Arjuna to a calf. Moreover the *Gita* shows a profound knowledge of the human

heart, its hopes and needs, its doubts and difficulties and its trials and temptations. Also it aims at producing a type of character which is the loftiest that the Hindu imagination has ever conceived. For, the ideal Yogin of the *Bhagavad Gita* is, like the Avatar Himself, both a man of contemplation and a man of action—a practical mystic whose head is in solitude and whose hands are in society.

D : Is the teaching of the *Gita* as authoritative as that of the *Sruti* ?

F : Yes. The *Gita*, being the essence of the *Upanishads*, is considered as authoritative as the *Sruti*. It is one of the three *prasthanas* or authoritative scriptures.

D : What are the other two *prasthanas* ?

F : The other two are the *Upanishads* and the *Brahmasutras* or *Vedantasutras*.

D : What are the *Brahmasutras* ?

F : The *Brahmasutras* are a number of aphorisms which systematise the whole teaching of the *Upanishads*.

D : Who is their author ?

F : Badanayana is the author of the *Brahmasutras*.

D: Why are the *Brahmasutras* so called ?

F : They are called *Brahmasutras*, because they expound the nature of Brahman on the Absolute and its relation to man and the world.

D : Why are they also called the *Vedantasutras* ?

F : Vedanta means the end of the Veda. The *Upanishads*, being the final portions of the Veda, are called *Vedantas*. And because the *sutras* string together the flowers of the *Vedanta* passages, they are called *Vedantasutras*.

D : If the *sutras* are brief aphorisms, how can we understand from them the whole teaching of the *Vedanta* ?

F : There are elaborate commentaries on the *sutras* written by eminent philosophers and theologians like Samkara, Ramanuja and Madhava. It is these that have given rise to the various schools of the *Vedanta-darsana.*

D : But you mentioned *Puranas* and *Agamas* before *Darsanas.* I should like to know something about them. What are *Puranas* ?

F : Puranas are religious stories which illustrate the truths of the *Sruti* by means of stories of kings, adventures of gods and legends of saints. They were the means employed by Hindu teachers of a later age for purposes of mass education. And you know that many beautiful stories such as those of Prahlada and Dhruva come to us from the Puranas.

D : Are not the accounts given in the *Puranas* historically true ?

F : Some of them may have a historical basis. But most of them are obviously imaginative. The Hindu scriptures deal with ideal truth, and not with historical truth. Their validity does not depend on any historical fact. This is very well illustrated in the accounts we have in the *Puranas* of the various *Avatars* of Vishnu. For these are intended to give only an imaginative representation of God's help rendered to man at different stages of his evolution.

D : What is an *Avatar* ?

F : An *Avatar* is an incarnation of God. When God comes down and lives in the flesh for any special purpose we call Him an *Avatar.*

D : What is the special purpose of an *Avatar* ?

F : Don't you remember the well-known verses in the *Gita* which explain the purpose of an *Avatar* ?

"Whenever there is decay of *Dharma,* O Arjuna, and an outbreak of *adharma* I embody myself. For the protection

of good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of Dharma I am born from age to age."

D : What are the most important of the *Avatars* referred to in our *Puranas* ?

F : The most important are, of course, Rama, Krishna and Buddha.

D : Is Buddha an *Avatar* ?

F : Yes, He is among the great teachers of mankind. In spite of some doctrinal differences between Hinduism and Buddhism, the Hindus look upon Buddha as one of themselves and recognise the value of the service he has rendered to true religion. Jayadeva, for instance, in his famous lyric poem, *Gita Govinda*, praises Vishnu as the great God who, under the guise of Buddha, taught us kindness to all living beings and prohibited animal sacrifices.

D : So is Buddhism a part of Hinduism like Vaisnavism or Saivism ?

F : Well, Buddhism is an offshoot of Hinduism. Many of its doctrines and ideals are the same as those of Hinduism. Buddha himself lived and died a Hindu. He looked upon himself more as a reformer than as an innovator. And yet Buddhism is not considered strictly orthodox by us now like Vaisnavism or Saivism, because Buddhists do not recognise the authority of the Veda. However this does not prevent us from looking upon Buddha as an *Avatar*.

D : Are the *Avatars* confined to India ?

F : Certainly not. In the verses that I have quoted from the *Gita* describing the purpose of an *Avatar*, no geographical or chronological limitations are indicated. There is no mention of any particular country or age.

D : So there may be *Avatars* in the future also ?

F : Yes. For God has not ceased to exist. Nor has

He ceased to care for his creatures. He is not so partial as to reveal Himself only to a particular nation or in a particular country or age. He reveals Himself whenever there is need of His grace and loving kindness. Our *Puranas* are clear on this point. As a matter of fact, one of the *Puranas* foretells a tenth *Avatar*. Hinduism makes for a progressive realisation of Truth. It undoubtedly contemplates the advent of new *Avatars*, as it does the promulgation of new laws, and the proclamation of new gospels. Hinduism does not bury its head in the past, nor does it rebelliously secede from the past. So it is not impossible, my child, that even now, while we are speaking here, the sacred feet of a new *Avatar* may be marching across the plain of Hindustan, interpreting our ancient *Dharma* in terms of modern life, and taking up the message of love and *ahimsa* where Buddha left it.

D : And, like new *Avatars*, there may be also new *Puranas* in future ?

F : Certainly, as the genius of our race is still alive.

D : How many *Puranas* have we already ?

F : There are eighteen chief *Puranas* of which the most popular are the *Vishnu Purana* and the *Bhagavata Purana*. In fact, the latter is so important in its influence on the religious imagination of India that it is placed on the same level as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

III

D : Then what are *Agamas* ?

F : The word *Agama* generally means a scripture. But in its narrow sense, it is used to denote a class of sectarian scriptures dealing with the worship of a particular aspect of God and prescribing detailed courses of discipline for the worshipper. As their aim is thus intensely practical they are known as *Sadhana Sastra*.

D : How many *Agamas* are there ?

F : The *Agamas*, like the *Upanishads*, are many in number. But they can be divided into three main groups, according as the deity that forms the object of worship is Vishnu, Siva or *Sakti*. These three groups have given rise to the three main branches of Hinduism, namely Vaisnavism, Saivism and Saktism. The *Vaisnava-agamas*, or *Pancharatra agamas*, glorify the Supreme under one of the names and forms of Vishnu. The *Saiva-agamas* glorify the Supreme under one of the names and forms of Siva and have given rise to an important school of philosophy, known as Saiva Siddhanta. The *Saktagamas* or *Tantras* glorify the Supreme as the mother of the universe under one of the names and forms of Devi.

D : What does each *Agama* consist of ?

F : Each *Agama* consists of four sections—(1) Philosophy, (2) mental discipline, (3) rules for constructing temples and images and (4) religious practices. Of course, these are all more or less technical matters. But the importance of the *Agamas* lies in the wonderful mass of devotional poetry that has sprung up around them in the vernaculars of India. This shows that the *Agamas* have succeeded in bringing religion home to the hearts of the common people.

D : Are all these *Agamas* based on the *Sruti* ?

F : Yes. Else they would not be authoritative. Some of them may have originated independently of the Veda. But,

when the communities that produced them entered the Hindu fold, they came under the influence of the Veda, were thoroughly imbued with its spirit and accepted its authority. A great Vaisnava teacher Yamunacharya discusses the relation of *Vaisnavaagamas* to the Vedas and establishes that the former are Vedic in spirit and hence authoritative. The Saivaite commentator Srikanta says: "We see difference between the Veda and the *Saiva Agama.*" Similarly, a great Saivite writer called Meykander says of the scriptures of his sect: "The *Agamas* are special and revealed for the benefit of the blessed, and they contain the essential truths of the Veda and the *Vedanta.*" So there is no doubt that, in spite of their immense diversity in forms and methods of worship, the *Agamas* are thoroughly Vedic in spirit and character.

D : You say that the communities that produced some of the *Agamas* entered the Hindu fold at one time. Does Hinduism make converts ?

F : Yes. Hinduism, no doubt, does not carry on any aggressive propaganda or make forcible conversions or abuse other religions. But in the course of its history it has peacefully absorbed many communities and changed the character of their religion, while allowing them to retain their customs and manners, and their rites and ceremonies.

D : Now, lastly, we come to the *Darsanas*, What are *Darsanas* ?

F : *Darsanas* are schools of philosophy or theology based again on the *Sruti.* Each school tries to correlate, systematise and develop the teachings of the various parts of the Veda. Here the appeal is to the logical understanding, while in the *Puranas* it is to the imagination, and in the *Agamas* it is to the heart.

D : How many *Darsanas* are there ?

F : We have six *Darsanas.*

D : What are they ?

F : They are *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta*. But they are divided into three groups on account of their resemblances in doctrine :—(1) *Nyaya-Vaisesika*, (2) *Samkhya-Yoga* (3) and *Mimamsa-Vedanta*.

D : Are the names of the founders of these schools known?

F : Yes. *Nyaya* was founded by Gautama. *Vaisesika* by Kanada, *Samkhya* by Kapila, *Yoga* by Patanjali, *Mimamsa* by Jaimini and *Vedanta* by Badarayana.

D : What does each *Darsana* consist of ?

F : It consists of a number of *Sutras* or aphorisms by the founder in which he gives out his theory. To these are attached an authoritative commentary of a later age. And then there are glosseries, notes, and commentaries of the original commentary.

D : Are these six *Darsanas* equally authoritative?

F : Each *Darsana* has had its day. It is the *Vedanta* alone that now holds the field as the most satisfactory system of philosophy that could be evolved out of the *Upanishads*.

D : Why is it considered more satisfactory than the others?

F : It is considered more satisfactory than the others for three reasons: First, because it duly subordinates individual reason to the revelation of the Veda: secondly, because it has a right conception of the relative importance of the various parts of the Veda: and, thirdly, because it is able to give the most satisfactory answers to all the difficult questions that vex the hearts of religious men.

D : Is individual reason always to be subordinated to the revelation of the Veda?

F : Yes. For if every individual were to follow his own reason, there would be chaos and no organised religion.

Moreover the mechanism of human knowledge, consisting of perception and inference, is of use to us only in understanding this world of time and space. But to understand the nature of God, who is above these, we have to supplement the testimony of the sense and reason by something else. And this is *sabada* or the testimony of the Veda. Thus, in matters of religion, we have three main *pramanas* or testimonies, namely, perception, inference and scripture. The Veda, as a *pramana*, is impersonal, independent and eternal. Therefore, mere individual reason has to be subordinated to it. Perception and inference, which are our primary instruments in matters of worldly knowledge, are only secondary here. Their function is only to elucidate the revelation of the Veda.

D : Is the Veda then an arbitrary authority overriding our own individual experience?

F : No, no. On the other hand, in the noble words of Samkara, the knowledge of Brahman taught by the Veda reaches its consummation only in individual spiritual experience. And our experience is valid only so far as it conforms to the standard of the Veda. The ultimate ground of Hindu religious belief is not merely the arbitrary authority of a religious tradition or a piece of historical evidence or an individual utterance, but facts of experience which could be ascertained by any man, who is prepared to go through the necessary discipline.

D : Do not the other five schools of philosophy employ the three *pramanas* of perception, inference and scripture?

F : Yes, they do. But, though in theory they accept the Veda as the Supreme authority, many of their doctrines are in flat contradiction to its teaching. The *Mimamsa* school, no doubt, goes farthest in making the testimony of scriptures supreme. But it has not a correct idea of the relative importance of the various parts of the Veda. Hence it has been superseded by the *Vedanta.*

D : What are the various parts of the Veda, and what is their relative importance?

F : We have already seen that the Veda consists of the *Mantras*, the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads*. But there is another kind of division according to the subject matter, namely, (1) *Karma-Kanda*, (2) *Upasana-Kanda* and (3) *Jnana-Kanda*. The first deals with rituals, the second with worship, and the third with the highest knowledge. According to the *Mimamsa* school of philosophers, ritual is all in all in the Veda, and the other two parts are to be taken as only accessories to it. This view is rejected by the *Vedanta* school, which rightly believes that *Jnana-Kanda* is the most important and that the other two are accessories to it. On account of the right conception of the relative importance of the *Pramanas* and of the teachings of the Veda, the *Vedanta-darsana* has superseded all the other *Darsanas* and still holds the field.

D: Father, are all these scriptures that you have described the sources of Hinduism?

F : Yes. The Veda is the main source. It is the funtain-head of all Indian culture. Its rituals and sacrifices lead to *Karma-Mimamsa*. Its *Upasanas* lead to the *Bhakti-doctrine*. Its philosophical speculations lead to *Vedanta*. Its metaphysical disquisitions lead to the logic of *Nyaya*. Its accounts of creation lead to *Samkhya*. Its descriptions of religious ecstasy lead to *Yoga*. Its conception of the cosmic law of *Rta* leads to that of the moral law of *Karma*. And its kings and Rishis are the starting point of our *Itihasas* and *Puranas*. We may even say that its occasional protests against sacrifices lead to Buddhism and Jainism. Thus all our secondary scriptures namely the *Smritis*, the *Itihasas* the *Puranas*, the *Agamas* and the *Darsanas* only develop this or that aspect of the Veda.

D : Father, is the order in which you have mentioned these secondary scriptures the historical order?

F : Well, it is more or less historical though there is considerable overlapping. We might divide the cultural history of India before the British conquest into—(1) The Age of the Mantras, (2) The Age of the Brahmanas, (3) The Age of the *Upanishads*, (4) The Age of the *Smrtis*, (5) The Age of the *Epics*, (6) The Age of the *Puranas*, (7) The Age of the *Agamas* and the *Darsanas* and (8) the Age of the later Bhakti schools. Some time ago I prepared a chart of the periods of Indian culture with five parallel columns—the first column giving the political history of the time, the second the religious history, the third the literary history, the fourth the history of fine arts and the fifth the names of the great characters. Let me show it to you. Here it is. You might take it with you and study it at your leisure. It gives you a bird's-eye view of the whole of Indian history up to the great Renaissance of the twentieth century amidst which we are now living.

D : Thank you, father. But I should like to know why, if the Veda is our primary scripture, we should not go direct to it without caring for any of these secondary scriptures.

F : The Veda is like a mine of gold, and the later scriptures are like the gold coins of the various ages. When you want to procure things that would make you comfortable, you should have ready money and not a piece of rock with veins of gold in it straight from the mine. Of course, every gold coin that is in the country is ultimately derived from the mine. But it has undergone various processes that make it useful to us at once. The ore has been smelted, the dross has been removed, the true metal has been refined, put into moulds and stamped. Similarly, the golden truths of the Veda have been refined by the wisdom of the ages and presented to us in a useful form in our later scriptures. That is why I recommend to you the *Gita*, rather than the *Upanishads.*

D : Father, when we have so many codes of laws, so

many sectarian scriptures and so many schools of philosophy, how can we arrive at a definite homogeneous religion?

F : My child, India is a land of religious experiment, and Hinduism is not a simple homogeneous religion. Hinduism is rather a name given to a league of religions. In its comprehensive and tolerant fold we find all types of religion from the highest to the lowest. For it does not force all minds into one groove. It frankly recognises the various grades of culture that obtain in a community.

D : But have all these religions a common aim?

F : Yes. They have a common aim, just as they have a common source. Their aim is to make man a perfect spirit like God. With this end in view they try to create political and social institutions which will enable every man to realise the God in him. Also, they rouse his imagination, they quicken his intellect, they form his character and undertake to guide him along the path of ascent. Those who accept the Hindu scriptures and undergo the disciplines they prescribe are bound to become perfect, free and god-like spirits in the end. This is what we call *Moksa*.

D : But is Hinduism the only way to the goal? Are all other religions false?

F : We, Hindus, consider it a sin to say that any religion is false. The *Avatar* of the *Gita* says: "Howsoever men approach me, even so do I accept them; for, on all sides, whatever path they may choose leads to me, O Arjuna." Therefore, Hinduism is the most tolerant as well as the most comprehensive of religions. It lays no claim to any monopoly of wisdom. Its authority is more a principle of continuity than a principle of exclusion. It abhors violent propaganda and forcible conversions. While it takes care to explain its position and absorbs willing followers, it never denounces other religions as false or evil. One of our minor

Upanishads says: "Cows have many colours, but the milk of all of them is white. Look upon teachers as cows, and knowledge as milk." Therefore, with us toleration is not simply a stroke of policy, but an article of faith. We look upon the whole world as a joint family. We welcome with open arms Muslims, Christians, Jews and Parsees as our brethren. We study their scriptures as reverently as our own, and bow before their prophets. And, as for Buddhists and Jains, they are the flesh of our flesh and the bone of our bone.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST ASCENT

I

D : Father, shall we resume our discussion of Hinduism today ? You said that we might meet once a week.

F : Yes, my child. But did you study the chart I gave you ?

D : Yes, father. It is very interesting. I now understand the greatness of our past. But it is difficult to remember all the details you give there.

F : You need not remember all the details. The chart is only for purposes of reference.

D : All the same I should like to have the whole thing in my mind, if possible. It would be very useful.

F : You will surely kill yourself by overstraining your mind in this way.

D : Oh ! No fear. And, father, is there any book which gives in the form of a connected narrative all the particulars mentioned in your chart ?

F : I am not aware of any. Of course, I collected the materials for the chart from various books.

D : But, father, why don't you write a book just expanding your chart into a narrative ?

F : Oh ! my dear, there are far more competent people to do it. Now, let us come to the subject on hand. First of all, let me see what you learnt last time.

D : Last time you gave me a clear idea of all the

authorities of Hinduism. You taught me that the *Sruti* is the primary authority and that the *Smrti*, the *Itihasa*, the *Purana*, the *Agama* and the *Darsana* are secondary authorities. The aim of the latter is only to develop, illustrate and embody the principles of the Veda. The primary authority is for all time, but the secondary authorities vary from age to age. You further taught me that the aim of all Hindu scriptures is to make man a perfect spirit like God and to bring into existence institutions which will help him to reach his goal. I take it, therefore, that according to Hinduism man's life on earth is to be considered a journey towards divine perfection.

F : I think all the great religions of the world agree in that. The path is the same, though it has different names. And we should always bear in mind that the goal of life is divine perfection or man's union with God. All our laws, our ethical codes and our forms of worship derive their value from this ultimate purpose, which we have to keep in view.

D : Father, I should like to know more about the path which leads to this goal. What is the first thing which a man has to do who wants to start on the journey ?

F : The first thing he has to do is to turn away from all evil. As the *Gita* says, vile and wicked men can never reach God. And one of the *Upanishads* says: "No one who has not turned away from bad conduct, whose senses are not under control, who is not composed and whose mind is not at peace can obtain Him through knowledge." Therefore, the first ascent of the upward path to God is entirely characterised by the faithful performance of one's own *Dharma*.

D : What is *Dharma* ?

F : The word, *Dharma*, is used in our scriptures in a somewhat technical as well as a general sense. In the technical sense *Dharma* comprises all actions, qualities, offerings etc. which the *Sastras* teach us as leading to our spiritual good. In the general sense *Dharma* comprises all

the duties that are imposed upon an individual in accordance with his position in life and with his own mental and moral development. You will see at once that the two meanings of *Dharma* are intimately connected together. Our duties and obligations acquire their significance only from the unseen spiritual value attached to them. And it is the function of scriptures to teach us what that spiritual value is.

D : What do you mean by saying that *Dharma*, in the sense of duties, is imposed on an individual in accordance with his position in life ?

F : *Dharma* takes different forms with different individuals. The duties of men differ according to their stations in life. For instance a soldier's duty is different from a doctor's. The former takes life; the latter saves it. Similarly a master's duty is different from a servant's, a teacher's duty is different from a pupil's, a father's duty is different from a son's, and so on. The well-being of a community is secured only when these respective duties of all its members are discharged in a spirit of goodwill and cooperation. A house that is divided against itself will fall. *Dharma*, therefore, implies social harmony and happiness, while *adharma* implies social discord and misery. Our sacred books say *dharanat dharmah*—that is, *Dharma* is so called because it sustains society.

D : You have said that a man's *Dharma* depends not only on his station in life, but also on his mental and moral development. May I know what that means ?

F : I will explain what I mean by an illustration. Take the case of Buddha. It was his duty as a royal prince to remain in his kingdom, and learn the arts of peace and war. But when a higher duty of retiring from the world to find out the cause of human misery was suggested to him by his inner voice he had to obey the call. If he had disobeyed it, he would have been false to the lights he had, and incurred sin. Thus, in the case of Buddha, what was *Dharma* before his

enlightenment would become *adharma* after his enlightenment.

D : So, righteousness depends not upon external acts, but upon the inward spirit of the man who acts ?

F : Quite so, my child. The Hindu scriptures often point out that inward righteousness is more important than external righteous acts and that ethical disposition is worth more than good conduct. Even our early lawgivers, who insist on the formal observance of the law and the performance of rites and ceremonies, distinctly say that ethical excellence is far more important than mere ceremonial purity. For instance, Gautama says: "He who is sanctified by the forty sacraments but whose soul is destitute of the eight good qualities will not be united with God, nor does he reach heaven." You should note here the contrast between sacraments which are merely ceremonies that have to be performed at the various stages of a man's life, as birth, childhood, youth, manhood, old age and death, and moral qualities such as compassion, forbearance etc. Moreover our lawgivers, in the lists that they give of penances for various sins, distinguish clearly sins of thought from sins of word and deed. The former are punished as severely as the latter.

D : Father, if, as you say, moral excellence is more important than ceremonial purity, what is the use of rites and ceremonies.

F : The use of rites and ceremonies lies in the training they give us. They are preliminaries to moral qualities. They are never ends in themselves. They are only means to an end.

D : What is the end ?

F : The end is the purification of the spirit. The *Gita* says—"Sacrifices; gifts and austerities purify the wise." Rites and ceremonies are the initial steps in moral progress.

They are the reminders of the law. They are enjoined, not on blind authority, but with reference to the goal of life. They are intended to lead to virtues.

D : How can rites and ceremonies lead to virtues ?

F : All wisely-directed rites, when they are not simply commemorative or symbolical, have corresponding virtues in view. For instance, an offering to the gods is a rite and it is intended to lead to self-sacrifice, which is a virtue. Alms-giving is laid down as a rite, and it is intended to lead to generosity, which is a virtue. Fasting is a rite, and it is intended to lead to self-control, which is a virtue. Similarly, the five great sacrifices that a householder is enjoined to offer every day to the Gods, to the Rishis, to the Pitrs, to men and other living beings, are intended to develop the virtues of devotion to God, devotion to learning, devotion to family, devotion to society and kindness to animals. It is only when rituals are made ends in themselves, without leading to any virtues or to any chastening of the spirit, that they become dead-wood impeding the growth of the soul.

D : Does the growth of the soul consist in acquiring virtues ?

F : Yes. A virtuous life purifies and strengthens the soul. God is eternal perfection, and to approach Him the soul must become pure. We have already seen that the end of man's life is to become divine, and that all our religious activities should be directed with reference to that end. Therefore, the first ascent of the soul's upward path consists in acquiring ethical purity. The bride should put on flowers and jewels before she meets the bridegroom. Virtues are the soul's ornaments.

D : What are the virtues that we have to cultivate ?

F : Almost all virtues known to man come within the province of every religion. But each religion emphasises only a few of them, and tries to bring the rest under the one

or the other of these cardinal virtues. It is the cardinal virtues emphasised by a religion that determine its individual character.

D : What are the cardinal virtues according to Hinduism ?

F : The cardinal virtues, according to Hinduism, are amply indicated in the epics and the Puranas. They are exemplified in the ideal characters which all Hindus love and venerate. And, what is remarkable, they are more or less common to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Therefore, they may be regarded as the distinctive marks of the religious spirit of India. They are these : *i*) purity (*sattva suddhi*), *ii*) self-control (*sama* and *dama*), *iii*) detachment (*vairagya*) *iv*) truth (*satyam*) and *v*) non-violence (*ahimsa*).

D : Will you please explain to me what is implied by each of these ? What exactly is purity ?

F : It implies both purity of body and purity of mind. All our cleanings and washings, all the purificatory baths and ceremonies, which are enjoined by the Hindu scriptures, and the elaborate rules, which are laid down regarding food and drink, are meant to suggest purity of mind and spirit.

D : Why should there be any rules at all for eating and drinking ? How is religion concerned with these ?

F : My child, religion is not a separate activity of life. It is an influence that ought to pervade all our activities. If our aim in life is to make our souls perfect in God, anything that checks the growth of the soul should be carefully removed. Our food and drink, which sustain the physical basis of the soul, are not such unimportant things as you imagine. For instance, it cannot be a matter of indifference, from a religious point of view, whether a man drinks water or wine. So, within certain limits, it is quite necessary that there should be some general rules for the common people in these matters. Had not Hinduism in its days of vigour

put its foot down on the drink habit in India, we should have had here, as in the West, the shameful spectacle of even respectable men getting themselves drunk at times. Even among our masses, it is only after our contact with the West that the drink problem has assumed serious proportions. In the palmy days of Hindu civilisation drinking was regarded as a degrading habit, and only the lowest classes indulged in it.

D : Are there any rules then with regard to the purity of food and drink ?

F : The general rules regarding food and drink may be gathered from the following verses in the *Gita* :

"The foods that promote length of life, goodness, strength, health, happiness and cheerfulness, and those that are sweet, soft nourishing and agreeable are the favourities of the good."

"The foods that are bitter, sour, salted, over-hot, pungent, dry and burning, and those that produce pain, grief and disease are liked by the passionate."

"And that which is stale and tasteless, putrid and mouldy, which is of the leavings and unclean, is the food dear to the dull."

D : But, father, do not hard and fast rules about eating, washing and cleaning make religion a mechanical thing ?

F : Yes, they do, if a man stops with mere external purity. But the Hindu sages emphatically say that external and physical purity is intended only to lead to internal and spiritual purity. The former without the latter is, of course, worse than useless. It is only a decorated corpse.

D : Does not inward purity mean a number of virtues ?

F : Yes. I have already said that each cardinal virtue comprises a large number of kindred virtues. Purity

comprises cleanliness, straightforwardness, frankness, innocence, and absence of envy, pride and malice.

D : Then the second cardinal virtue, which you have mentioned, is self-control. What does this imply ?

F : Self-control implies the control of the flesh and the spirit. We have to root out the sins of the flesh and the sins of the mind. The latter are more subtle than the former. Sins like gluttony, drunkenness and sensuality bear their condemnation on their very faces. They attack men in all their nakedness, and their beastly nature is easily recognised. But the sins of the mind put on the guise of virtues before they attack us. Hypocrisy, pride and bigotry are easily mistaken for virtues. Generally, the masses are a prey to the sins of the flesh, and the classes are a prey to the sins of the mind. Self-control means the control of both body and mind. The *Gita* points out how desire has for its seat the senses, the mind and the understanding. The enemy has to be fought on all these fields before he is vanquished.

D : So self-control also implies a whole group of virtues ?

F : Yes. It implies patience, forbearance, modesty, humility, self-sacrifice and self-effacement. When a man has acquired the two cardinal virtues I have described, namely, purity and self-control, he becomes, in the language of the *Gita*, a *visuddhatma* and a *vijitatma*—that is, one who has purified himself and also conquered himself.

D : Is self-conquest the same as asceticism ?

F : Self-conquest is called asceticism when it exceeds its proper limits. Some critics say that Hinduism glorifies asceticism, and that it wants its followers to suppress the flesh altogether. Hinduism does nothing of the kind. It recognises, on the other hand, that the body is a *dharma-sadhana* or instrument of righteousness. Accordingly, it only seeks to regulate its appetites and cravings. The flesh

is not suppressed, but is only taught its place. A man who pampers his body is not fit for the kingdom of the spirit. Hinduism takes into account all the factors of human personality—body, mind, soul and spirit—and prescribes a graded discipline for the various stages of a man's career. It lays down rules for the so-called *asramas* of the student, the householder, the recluse and the *sannyasin*. The householder is called upon to acquire wealth, to gratify his legitimate desires, to practise virtue and to work for salvation. The well-known Hindu formula of *Dharmartha-kamamoksha* therefore indicates the ideal of complete life. It is only by slow degrees that the soul has to be weaned from the desires of the flesh. The goal of complete restraint has to be reached only in the final stage. Thus self-conquest is glorified, not for its own sake, but for the ultimate liberation of the spirit from the thraldom of the flesh. At the same time we should not be frightened by the word asceticism. All great men of India have been ascetics—from Buddha to Gandhi. And all Hindus, though they may not be able to live up to the ideal of a *sannyasin*, are ardent admirers of *sannyasa*.

D : Then the third cardinal virtue, which you have mentioned, is detachment. What does that imply ?

F : Detachment is freedom from attachments or earthly ties. Every man is generally attached to his possessions, family, friends and relations and also to his opinions —in fact, to everything which he calls his own. Naturally the attachments are very strong in early life. It is the first shock of death that opens the eyes of the inexperienced person to the ephemeral nature of these ties. When calamities happen undisciplined minds are thrown off their balance. Some curse their fate. Some curse the gods. And some are crushed by grief. This is because they have not thought about the conditions of our tenure in life. They have not reflected on the fact that we are all creatures of time. We and the objects of our love are only like the pieces of wood

that drift together for a time on the ocean flood and then part for ever. The objects of our love are given to us, so that they may be utilised for the finer issues of the soul. Everyday we see misers cut off from their hoards of wealth, tyrants from their positions of power, and all men from their nearest and dearest. Death casts its pale shadow on all our pleasures and merriments. Weak men weep and wail when they encounter the ills of life. Brave men stoically endure them and pass on. But religious men know how to meet them. Janaka, when his capital was on fire, calmly faced his calamity and said: "Mithila is burning, but nothing that is mine perishes there." So complete was the detachment of this ideal Hindu king from his kingship. The *Gita*, on almost every page, says that a man should give up all earthly ties and establish a single heavenly tie, if he is to know the bliss of God. Samga or earthly attachment has to give place to yoga or union with God. The former is the source of all our unhappiness, and the latter is the only guarantee of everlasting happiness.

D : Father, I can understand detachment from our possessions being regarded as a virtue. But I cannot understand how detachment from our brothers and sisters, from our friends and relations, could be a virtue.

F : My dear child, even our sacred domestic affections are not ends in themselves. *Yajnavalkya*, in a famous discourse to his wife Maitreyi, in one of the *Upanishads*, says: "Verily, my dear, it is not for the love of the husband that the husband is dear, but it is for the love of the *Atman* that the husband is dear. Verily, my dear, it is not for the love of the wife that the wife is dear, but it is for the love of the Atman that the wife is dear." The pure love that our hearts learn in the family circle should be extended gradually to all. A *sannyasin* is not one who has divested himself of all love, but one who has extended his love to all, and looks upon the

whole world as his family. The *Gita* says :

"He who looks upon all like himself in pleasure and pain—he is considered, O Arjuna, a perfect yogin."

Till we look upon our dearest ones as only parts of a whole, our affections are not free from the taint of selfishness. Friends come and go, but friendship remains for ever. Death takes away those whom we dearly love, but it cannot take away the love from our hearts. Therefore, I say friendship is more real than friends, love is more real than the beloved. Love, friendship, sympathy and kindness are divine qualities; and the more we cherish them in our hearts, the nearer are we to God. And the way to cherish them is not to be blindly attached to the particular objects of those feelings. It is, of course, human to love our relations and friends; but to transcend such narrow loves is divine. It is a divine character, and not simply a human character, that our scriptures reveal to us. Does not Rama show a certain detachment in his love to Sita ? Did not Buddha transcend his human love to Yasodhara and Rahula and afterwards take them into his fold in heavenly love ? So detachment does not mean the sacrifice of our affections, but their extension and purification.

D : You spoke of detachment from one's own opinions. What does that mean ?

F : There are many who can get over their attachment to their possessions, and their attachment to their relations and friends, but not their attachment to their opinions and prejudices—the children of their minds. For this is the subtlest form of *ahamkara* or egoism. A true *yogin* cultivates a detachment even from his own mind. He knows he ought to be above his own mind and ought not to identify himself with even the most dearly cherished schemes of his heart. He should have detachment enough to consider all sides of a question. He should have no interests other than those of truth. And, if his inherited or acquired opinions stand between him and truth, they should unhesitatingly be

brushed aside. This work would be less painful if he should cultivate the habit of detachment from the beginning.

D : Your reply brings us to the next cardinal virtue —truth. But truthfulness is a virtue inculcated by all religions, even by those which are very primitive.

F : Yes. In all Hindu scriptures truthfulness is constantly alluded to as the basis of both heroic and saintly types of character. For instance in the *Mahabharata*, Bhishma says to Yudhisthira :

"It is impossible, O king, to exhaust the merits of truth. For this reason the Brahmans, the Pitrs and the Gods speak highly of truth. There is no duty higher than truth, and no sin more dreadful than untruth. Indeed truth is the very root of righteousness. Therefore, one should never interfere with truth. On one occasion the merits of truth and a thousand horse-sacrifices were weighed against each other in the balance. Truth proved heavier than a thousand horse-sacrifices."

In this passage we see how the teacher passes from the ritual to the moral plane, and points out the immense superiority of the latter over the former. I have given you only one instance. But thousands of such instances can be given from our epics and Puranas. The colossal sacrifices made by Harischandra, Yudhisthira and Dasaratha in keeping the promises they made show the high place given to truth by Hindu sages. In fact, our scriptures say that all virtues are only forms of truth.

D : Therefore, truth does not mean mere truth-speaking.

F : No. It means also what is right in conduct, what is just in social relations and what is true in knowledge. I have already said that Hinduism is a progressive quest after truth. It is a quest after right conduct, just dealing and true knowledge. For God is truth. He is the source of all

righteousness, beauty, justice and knowledge. These are eternal values. And it is only their temporary phases that we see in the world. But sin, ugliness, injustice and ignorance are all forms of untruth, which is a mere shadow without any substance. So what our religion enjoins by *satyam* is not mere truth-speaking, but our enthusiastic support of all correct views, just causes, right actions and beautiful ways of life. It is a virtue that opens the door to infinite progress in science, in art, in social justice and the higher morality of the future.

D : What do you mean by the higher morality of the future ?

F : Morality is a thing of growth. For, in every age, our ethical codes are only partial expressions of the highest ideal revealed to us in the Veda. With reference to that ideal our codes might be extended indefinitely. *Dharma*, according to our sages, is not a fixed quantity. It changes from age to age. Every *yuga* has its own *yuga-dharma*. Consider, for instance, how far we have progressed from the position of our early lawgivers in the matter of animal sacrifices, punishments for crimes, treatment of the lower classes, etc.

D : Does *Dharma* always progress ? Does it never deteriorate ?

F : *Dharma* deteriorates when the society becomes degenerate, or when it falls on evil times. Many of our later *Puranas* deplore that the cow of *Dharma*, which once walked on four legs, walks in their time only on one leg. The authors of these lived in troublous times of war and social disruption when the standard of morality went down. We have even now the heritage of those evil times. We have certainly deteriorated from the position of our early law-givers in the matter of altruism, social solidarity and the treatment of women. *Dharma*, therefore, depends for its progress on national prosperity and national independence.

D : Is there no limit then to the progress of *Dharma?*

F : The progress of *Dharma* means the progress of man towards divine perfection. Therefore, who can dare prescribe limits to it ? Humanity is still comparatively young. It is, as it were, only the other day that man appeared on the earth with his notions of right and wrong. Who knows for how many millions of years the earth had rolled on its axis before man was evolved ? And who knows for how many millions of years more it is going to revolve? Who knows what marvels the eternal magician is going to produce? What was deemed impossible a thousand years ago has become possible now in the scientific world. Similarly, what is impossible now for the ordinary man in the moral sphere, owing to the weakness of the flesh, may become possible for the whole race a million years hence. By that time who knows that the ascending spirit may not express itself through a better instrument than human personality ? Who knows that even this globe may not be peopled, before the time of its annihilation, with beings more spiritual than man ?

D : Father, what you say is rather bewildering.

F : No, my child. I am only stating facts. Truth is bewildering. It is far more bewildering than our wildest imaginings. The contemplation of truth swiftly takes us away from our little systems of morals and metaphysics. The Hindu scriptures teach us that the pursuit of truth, wherever it may lead and whatever sacrifices it may involve, is indispensable to the progress of man. Hence Hinduism has never opposed scientific progress. It has never opposed speculation in metaphysics or ethics. The last page of its ethics is not yet written, and will never be written. If only we have eyes to see, a new chapter is being added to the ethics of India in our own lifetime. But let me not dwell on it now. Let us pass on to the next cardinal virtue.

D : But I should like to know what virtues you would include under truth,

F : I would include honesty, sincerity, justice, faithfulness, a patient investigation of facts, an appreciation of all forms of beauty, and all other similar virtues. In fact, as I have said, our scriptures declare that all virtues are only forms of truth.

D : Now we come to the last in our list of cardinal virtues, namely, *ahimsa* or non-violence. What does this imply ?

F : There is an oft-quoted Hindu saying — *ahimsa paramo dharmah*, which means that non-violence is the highest law. There is no doubt that the gospel of non-violence is the most remarkable contribution of India to the culture of the world. Non-violence has two sides—negative side and a positive side. On the negative side, it means refraining from giving pain to any creature in any way. And, on the positive side, it means perfect love towards all creatures. The greatest exponent of *ahimsa* in modern times thus speaks of it :

"Non-violence is a perfect stage. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally, though unconsciously. Man does not become divine though he personifies innocence in himself. Only then does he truly become man. In our present state we are partly men and partly beasts. and, in our ignorance and even arrogance, say that we truly fulfil the purpose of our species when we deliver blow for blow, and develop the measure of anger required for the purpose. We pretend to believe that retaliation is the law of our being, whereas in every scripture we find that retaliation is nowhere obligatory but only permissible. It is restraint that is obligatory. Retaliation is indulgence requiring elaborate regulations. Restraint is the law of our being. For the highest perfection is unattainable without the highest restraint. Suffering is thus the badge of the human tribe".

You know that Mahatma Gandhi, who says these words, has made the practice of non-violence a science,

Non-violence has to be practised not only by individuals, but also by communities and nations and it has to be practised in all spheres of life. That is why I say a new chapter is being added to Hindu ethics in our generation.

D : Has Hinduism always taught that we should return good for evil? Or is this a comparatively new gospel ?

F : My child, scores of passages could be quoted from the *Mahabharata* to show that this has been the teaching of the Hindu sages from time immemorial. Moreover, the law of love is extended in the religions that arose in India even to the sub-human world. It is not limited to humanity as in the ethical codes of other countries.

D : But, father, is complete non-violence possible ?

F : The Hindu sages, who preach non-violence, recognise that perfect *ahimsa* is only an ideal. It is like a straight line in geometry. We can only make an approximation to it in practice. All creatures, for instance, get their food only by violence. They have to kill and eat. Some kill animal life, and some vegetable life. But, as animals are higher forms of life than vegetables, to kill animals is a greater violence than to cut vegetables. Therefore, Hinduism exalts vegetarianism above meat-eating, and regards the ideal saint as one who lives on air, as it were, and who does no injury to animal or vegetable life in maintaining his bodily existence.

D : Why does Hinduism not insist on vegetarianism ?

F : Hinduism lays down no uniform law for all sections of the community. It teaches the superiority of vegetarianism, and allows individuals and classes to reach the ideal in their own time when they have acquired the necessary *adhikara* or moral competence.

D : Then non-violence in our country is only an individual virtue or a class virtue, and not a national virtue ?

F : Non-violence may fairly be called a national virtue in India. For, though it is practised by small sections of the society, it has considerably influenced the Hindu community as a whole. Why, we may say that it has made the Hindus what they are to-day. Most of their virtues and vices could be traced to the ideal of non-violence. Their mildness, their hospitality, their humanity, their horror of bloodshed, their abhorrence of taking out life, their kindness to animals and their worship of the cow are all due to the ideal of non-violence. The pacific character of Hindu civilisation is a result of this ideal. It is said that the Indian masses, in spite of their terrible poverty, are far less brutal than the masses in other countries. If that is a fact, it is due to the non-violence practised by the classes.

D : But, father, is there not another side to this picture ?

F : Yes. I have already said that most of our vices, as well as our virtues, could be traced to the ideal of non-violence. Remember *ahimsa* is only for those who are brave and strong. It is for those who could strike, but would not. To flee from the brute and the bully and call it non-violence is the worst form of self-deception. What the ideal of non-violence requires us to do is to substitute spiritual strength for brutal strength, and not cowardice for valour. When a man cannot use spiritual strength, either because he is incompetent or because his foe has no spark of humanity in him, it is his duty to use physical strength in defence of himself and what he holds dear. It is ridiculous for a lamb to cherish ideals of non-violence when the wolf is of a different opinion. So in a world, such as ours, in which men still resort to brutal strength for gaining their objects, and nations compose their quarrels by means of the sword, *ahimsa*, in the hands of those who have no *adhikara* for it, could only result in a lack of manliness. And a lack of manliness is the parent of many sins.

D : What are the virtues that true *ahimsa* implies?

F : True *ahimsa* necessarily implies gentleness, courtesy, kindness, hospitality, humanity and love. You will observe that all these are social virtues. In fact, in the list of cardinal virtues that I mentioned, all individual virtues are grouped under the first three, namely, purity, self-control and detachment; and all social virtues are grouped under the last two, namely truth and *ahimsa*. In Hindu ethics, social virtues have a higher rank than individual virtues. And society, according to us, includes not only living men but also those who have gone before us, those who will come after us, all beings above us like the Gods and the *Pitrs*, and all beings below us like birds and beasts. We have our duties not only to our neighbours, but also to our ancestors, to our descendants, and to all living beings lower than man. I have already pointed out to you the significance of the five great sacrifices which a householder is enjoined to offer every day. Thus we see what a grand organic conception of society the Hindu sages had. It is a conception not limited by space or time. Nor is it confined to mankind.

III

D : Now, father, is the cultivation of all these main and subsidiary virtues the sole aim in the first stage of man's ascent to God ?

F : Yes. We begin religious life with rites and ceremonies. But these are only external means of purification. We have to pass quickly from these to virtues, which are the internal means by which the purification of the soul is effected.

D : Has a man to progress from one virtue to another in the order in which you have given them—purity, self-control, detachment, truth and non-violence ?

F : No. It is only for the sake of convenience that we divide and sub-divide virtues. For instance, we cannot draw a hard and fast line between individual virtues and social virtues. They are all really one, and constitute what we call a virtuous character. Their significance should always be understood with reference to the goal of religious life, namely, divine perfection. Therefore, we should say that the formation of a virtuous character is the aim in the first ascent, rather than the cultivation of the cardinal and other virtues.

D : Why, what is the difference between the formation of a virtuous character and the cultivation of virtues ?

F : Virtues, like rituals, are more or less in the nature of commandments proceeding from an external authority. It is very few who understand their reference to the goal of religious life. Moreover, their validity depends upon circumstances. It is not always easy to say at what point virtues cease to be virtues. Firmness easily passes into obstinacy, courage into foolhardiness, non-violence into cowardice, self-control into self-violence, and so on. Therefore, the cultivation of virtues may merely imply a mechanical obedience to moral commandments. This, of course, is necessary in the beginning, as rites and ceremonies are necessary. That is why our lawgivers lay down the rules of *Dharma* in an

apparently dogmatic manner. But soon, the moral man has to act for himself. He has to decide for himself what is true, what is just and what is virtuous in the given circumstances. He should no longer be hampered by rules and precepts. When he has thus acquired a virtuous disposition, he becomes independent in his judgment, and rarely goes wrong.

D : If precepts and commands are thus superseded, what is the standard to be followed ?

F : A *dharmatma* or a virtuous personality is a surer standard than a rule of *Dharma*. The former is a living tree, the latter is only a dried fruit. In the *Taittiriya Upanishad* a teacher, giving some parting advice to his pupil on the completion of his education, says: "If you should have any doubt concerning an act or a line of conduct, in such a case you should conduct yourself as teachers, who are competent to judge, capable and devoted, and who are not harsh lovers of virtue, conduct themselves."

D : Are men the guides of right conduct, and not scriptures of sacred law ?

F : Men as well as scriptures. According to Hinduism, the guide of right conduct are the scripture, usage, the example of saints and the inner self or conscience. For Manu says: "The Vedas are the source of the sacred law, next the *Smrti* and the conduct of those who understand the scriptures, and also the customs of holy men, and finally the satisfaction of the inner self." And Kalidasa, in a well-known and oft-quoted verse, says that the promptings of a pure heart are a sure guide in matters of doubt. Thus, by making the example of saints an authority, and by regarding the Vedic ideal of divine perfection as the standard of reference, Hinduism keeps its *Dharma* alive and its moral code flexible.

D : Father, you have said that our lawgivers not only lay down *Dharma*, but also prescribe penances for various sins. What are sins ? And how many of them are there ?

F : Sins, like virtues, are innumerble. Different law-givers give different lists. But they are generally classified in two ways.

D : What are they ?

F : Firstly, all sins are divided into sins of thought, sins of word and sins of deed. For an evil thought or a harsh word is as much of the nature of sin as a wicked deed. This threefold division shows the refinement of the Hindu ethical writers who would not excuse even a harsh or obscene word, though it has no evil intention behind it, and though it does not result in any cruel deed.

D : And what is the other classification ?

F : Just as we have all virtues grouped under the five cardinal virtues, so we have all sins grouped under the three deadly sins of *kama*, *krodha* and *lobha*, or sensuality, hate and greed.

The *Gita* says :

"Triple is the gate of hell, destructive of the soul—sensuality, hate, and greed. Therefore, one should forsake these three. The man, who escapes these three gates of darkness and works for the good of his soul, reaches the supreme state."

But all divisions are rather artificial. There is only one sin, though its forms are numberless. And that is self-centred desire. Sin is simply man's opposition to God, or, more correctly, the opposition of the flesh to the spirit. A sinner is one who is out of harmony not only with the society around him, the laws of which he breaks, but also with the universal kingdom of spirit, of which he is a part. For, the *Dharma* he is violating is only an earthly transcript of *Rta*, which the Vedas declare to be the rhythm and the order of the universe. Man, in his *ajnana* or blindness, thinks that he can be independent of the rule of the universe. He is like a limb that refuses to function with the rest of the body, and sets up some local action, with the result that inflammation, pain and disease

are caused. A sinner is a diseased limb of society, and a rebel from the kingdom of God. He sets his own will against that of the Creator. And, remember both are in himself. For man is both spirit and flesh. The former is his higher nature, and the latter is his lower nature. The way of the former is *jnana* or saving knowledge, and the way of the latter is *kama* or ruinous desire. When Arjuna asks Krishna in the *Gita* what prompts a man to commit sin, he is told: "It is desire, it is wrath which springs from a passionate nature. It is a monster of appetite and sin. Know thou it is the foe here."

D : Are all our desires our foes ?

F : No. It is only unlawful desire that is the enemy. For the God of the *Gita* says: "I am the *kama* in all beings, when it is not opposed to *Dharma*." Desires are bad only when their object is the illicit gratification of the self. As long as man is self-centered and erects walls of separation between himself and his fellows, his desires come into conflict with the law of universal love and retard his progress.

D : But how can a man of the world cease to take care of himself and his family, and act according to the law of universal love ? If what you say is true, all of us are sinners ?

F : Yes. All of us are sinners in a way. Every religion teaches us that. Hindu scriptures constantly say that existence is evil, and that *Samsara* exists only for sinners. Buddha equates life with *dukha*. Christianity teaches that all men are born sinners, and that the world is always antagonistic to God.

D : Is not this mere pessimism ?

F : No. For pessimism is a philosophic theory that says that life is an evil, that the world has no purpose, that nothing rules here but blind will, and that, therefore, men should seek deliverance from this world of misery and suffering. This is very far from Hinduism, which believes in an immanent God and the ultimate salvation of all men, and disbelieves

in eternal punishment and the ultimate reality of evil. Hinduism everywhere claims to show the way to permanent happiness. It teaches that immortal souls cannot be satisfied with mortal things. Therefore, it exhorts men not to put faith in the fleeting pleasures of the world, but in the joys of the spirit. There can be no beginning of religious life, unless we look upon the world as mainly evil. Dissatisfaction with the present life is the counterpart of the hope of a future life. All that most of us can do in this world is to acquire a little cleanliness in an ocean of dirt, a little righteousness in an ocean of sin, a little beauty in an ocean of ugliness, and a little love in an ocean of selfishness. If we do not shrink from the dirt, the sin, the ugliness and the selfishness of the world and denounce them as evil, we have no hope of progress. We all start from a self-centred life. But when our conception of self gradually expands so as to include not only the family, but also the community and the country to which we belong, we grow less and less sinful. As we learn to love and work for larger and larger units, our desires purify themselves and coalesce with the will of God. All moral progress lies in harmonizing our self-will with the will that rules the universe.

D : Is that the way in which we can get rid of our sins ?

F : Yes. We can get rid of our sins most easily by expanding our souls. This creates in us a virtuous disposition, and increases our spiritual power which burns up all sin. Every virtuous act, that is the outcome of our expanding love, adds to the hidden strength of the soul.

D : Is it necessary to root out every sin from our souls ?

F : Yes, my dear. Is it not necessary to stop every leak in a ship to save it from sinking? A particular sin is only a symptom of the disease of the soul. It is not simply a local inflammation which could be removed by an external application.

D : If that is so, what is the use of the penances and purificatory rites laid down by our lawgivers ?

F : Penances and purificatory rites are prescribed only for those who have turned away from sin. They come in only after the change of heart. They are like external applications which only supplement, but can never supplant obedience to the general laws of health.

D : What is the use of them, if they only follow a change of heart ?

F : They are a mark that the man is retracing his false steps. They serve to show his repentance and his public confession. The very word *prayaschitta* applied to such rites connotes a determination to change one's heart and to atone for the sin. No great lawgiver ever admits that sin could be removed by means of distribution of gifts or observance of fasts and vigils, without any antecedent change of heart. Penances are only confirmatory rites. They confirm the soul's purification. But the purification itself must come from within. No man can be saved from without. The health of the soul, like the health of the body, can only be evoked from within and never be communicated from without.

D : If a man allows sin to grow in his heart and tries to purify himself, what will happen ?

F : One sin leads to another, the man's spiritual resistance becomes weak, his nature is coarsened, and he sinks low in the scale of *Samsara*.

IV

D : What is *Samsara*?

F : *Samsara* is the cycle of births and deaths through which the soul of every creature passes before it attains *Moksa* or liberation. Hinduism teaches that all creatures, as long as they are creatures, are involved in this time-process. And the state of each creature in any particular life depends upon the *karma* or the good and evil thoughts and deeds of its preceding lives. The law of *karma* is a unique and characteristic feature of the religious thought of India. It is taught not only by Hindu scriptures, but also by Buddhist and Jain scriptures.

D : What exactly is the law of *karma* ?

F : The law of *karma* is a moral law corresponding to the physical law of causation. As a man sows, he shall reap. Every thought and every act of his are, as it were, weighed in the scales of eternal justice. God, according to Hinduism, does not sit in judgment over human actions on some future day, but here and now. His law is wrought into our natures. Just as nature is subject to unalterable laws, so is our moral nature also subject to law. Our characters and destinies shape themselves from life to life not according to arbitrary commands or whims, but according to organic laws.

D : How can the actions done in a former body, which is dead and gone, affect our character and destiny in this life?

F : The actions of the former body do not die with the body. They leave an indelible trace on the mind or the soul. Our scriptures call it *apurva* or *adrsta*. This is the seed which grows into our character and destiny in the present life.

D : So is the law of *karma* one of cause and effect ?

F : Yes. It works in the moral world, as the law of cause and effect works in the physical world. For instance,

whenever you put your hand into the fire you burn your fingers. This happens at all times and in all places. The same cause produces the same effect, provided no other cause intervenes. In fact, the cause and the effect are one. They are organically connected together. Similarly, in the moral world, whenever you steal, your character is affected for the worse. The more often you steal, the more thievish you become. On the other hand, whenever you help your neighbour you improve your character. And the more you improve your character, and the more often you help, the more beneficent you become. The law of *karma* is thus only an extension of the invariable sequence that we see in this life. It tells us that what we are now is the result of what we thought and did in the past, and that what we shall be in the future will be the result of what we think and do now.

D : Do you mean, then, that a man's birth and circumstances in this life depend mostly upon his own thoughts and actions in the past lives?

F : Yes. How else can we explain the inequalities of life that we see all around us? God is not partial. He would not, of His own accord, make one man strong and another man weak, one man healthy and another man sickly, and one man sensual and another man spiritual. He would never, of His own accord, put one man in surroundings that help the progress of his soul, and another man in surroundings that hinder the progress.

D : Father, I have read somewhere that God has made some people unhappy in this world so that there may be opportunities for others to develop the virtues of pity, compassion and love, and thus glorify Him.

F : That cannot be right. For He must be a vain and cruel God who would make some men miserable that others might exercise their virtues on them, and thus glorify Him. No, no. The inequalities of life are due to ourselves, and not to God. We carry with us our past. We are our own

past. The mental and moral tendencies that the soul acquires in a particular life, as a result of its purposes and actions, work themselves out in suitable surroundings in the next. And new sets of tendencies are acquired, which again find a suitable environment in which they work themselves out. This process goes on through several lives till the soul obtains *Moksa* or liberation.

D : But how is it that we do not remember anything of our past lives ?

F : Because our conscious memory, which has for its seat our brain, is stored only with the impression acquired in this body. But beside our conscious mind, there is a huge unexplored subconscious region in which is stored up all our past experience. It is this that is responsible for the working of the law of *Karma*.

D : Have we got any evidence for this and for the working of the law of *karma* ?

F : There is, first of all, what we may call the scriptural evidence. The Veda teaches it. And there are many instances in our sacred books of great *Rishis* remembering their past lives. But, from a secular point of view, the existence of genius is the best evidence we have for the law. We often come across people who show a great genius for music, art or literature, which cannot be explained either by heredity or education or environment. Again, it often happens in the lives of many persons that a very trivial common place incident unlocks, as it were, a door in the heart, and a great experience that has been stored up bursts out, tearing away the old landmarks and changing the man's character completely. How can such things be explained without recognising the law of *karma* and admitting that we carry in our subconscious memory all the *samskaras* or experiences of our past lives? Even the ordinary instincts may be said to be the result of the experience acquired in past lives.

D : Father, if we have no actual recollection of our past sins, is it just to punish us for them ?

F : What you say applies only to man-made laws and punishments, and not to natural laws and consequences. In artificial man-made laws the penalties laid down have generally no natural relation to the crimes committed. For instance, if a man steals he is either imprisoned or put in stocks or his right hand is cut off. The punishment differs in different countries, and is purely arbitrary. In such a case you may say it is unjust to punish a man for a crime of which he has no recollection. But in the case of a natural law this does not apply. For instance, if a man drinks poison, he will die whether he has recollection of his action or not. God is not a judge sitting in a remote heaven meting out punishments according to a penal code. He is an in-dwelling spirit whose law is wrought into our natures.

D : If a man's birth and circumstances are determined by his past *karma*, what is the use of his efforts now ? If everything is preordained for him, how can he be held responsible for his actions ?

F : Man's will is ever free. Else, moral life would be impossible. All is not determined. Within the limits set by birth, environment and tendencies, a man has still ample scope to carve a career for himself. The *Gita* in a suggestive metaphor calls the body a plot of ground. Every soul is a farmer to whom a plot of ground is given. The extent of the ground, the nature of its soil, the changes of weather to which it is exposed are all pre-determined. But the farmer is quite at liberty to till the ground, to manure it and to raise suitable crops, or to neglect it and allow it to run to waste. Similarly, there are elements of freedom, as well as elements that have been pre-determined, in all our lives. The law of *karma* recognises both of these.

D : What are the elements of freedom ? And what are the elements that are preordained ?

F : Hindu scriptures divide a man's *karma* into three parts—*Prarabdha*, *Samcita* and *Agami*. *Prarabdha karma* is that part of a man's accumulated *karma* which has begun to bear fruit in the present life. It is a thing which is entirely determined, and cannot be avoided. It gives rise to those conditions of a man's existence which he cannot get over, however hard he may try. We cannot, for instance, get over our sex or parentage or the colour of our skin in this life. We cannot jump out of our bodies. As far as such things are concerned, every one will admit that man is a creature of circumstances. Therefore, *Prarabdha karma* can be exhausted only by being experienced. *Samcita karma* is the name given to the accumulated *karma* of all the previous lives of a man. As a result of all his actions in the past, he acquires a certain character and certain tendencies. These are not unalterable like sex and parentage. It is possible to uproot evil habits by persistent effort, and plant good ones in their stead. *Samcita karma*, unlike *Prarabdha*, could be expiated by penances. And our scriptures say that unlike *Prarabdha*, it could be totally destroyed by *Jnana*. Lastly, *Agami karma* is that which is being created now in the present life. Its fruits will come to us in a future life. It is entirely in our hands. As we sow, so we shall reap. If our thoughts are pure, our actions righteous, and our desires unselfish, we create for ourselves conditions which will accelerate our progress towards perfection. If, on the other hand, we sin, penal blindness overtakes us, and we go down in the moral scale of *Samsara*, and suffer for it in the lives to come, till retributive justice brings us to our senses.

D : Cannot all this process take place in one life ?

F : I am surprised at your question.

How many of us in this world are fit for *Moksa*, which means really God-like perfection ? It is monstrous to suppose that the soul could obtain its eternal reward or its eternal punishment by the actions of a single life; for, in that case, either the reward or the punishment would be intolerably

unjust. It is only after a long series of lives of sustained effort that a man could attain to the perfection of God. One span of life is all too short for the great end in view.

D : But even one span of life is not allowed to all. Some people die young, and others live long to a very old age. How is this to be explained ?

F : I have already said that, out of the vast store of our accumulated *karma*, a part comes to fruition in one life. It is in accordance with this *Prarabdha* that our present bodies and our surroundings have come into existence. When it is fully worked out, the soul has to depart from the body with the experience gathered here, and seek birth again elsewhere.

D : So death is not accidental but designed ?

F : It may seem accidental to us. But how can there be accidents in a world ruled by God, whose will is the law? One of our scriptures says: "A man will not die before his time has come, even though he has been pierced by a thousand shafts; he will not live after his time is out, even though he has been only touched by a blade of *kusa* grass?

D : If so, does not the law of *karma* fill us with despair that we can never avert what is sure to come to pass?

F : But we do not know what is going to come to pass. Therein lies our incentive to work. We have to discharge our duty, and leave the result to God. If every man could interfere with the events of the world at his own will and pleasure, what a chaotic world would it be! No, no. The law of *karma*, far from filling us with despair, fills us with hope. It teaches us that, in the moral world as well as in the material world, nothing happens by chance. Just as a savage, who dreads a storm or an eclipse as a sign of the anger of his gods, ceases to dread it when he comes to know the laws of nature, so when we come to know the law of *karma*, we cease to dread the arbitrariness of chance, accident and luck, In a lawless universe our efforts would be futile. But

in a realm of law, we feel secure and guide ourselves with the help of our knowledge. When we know that sin entails suffering, that as we sow so we shall reap, and that our entire future will not be decided by what we do or fail to do in a single lifetime, but that we shall be given as many chances to improve ourselves as we want. We are filled with hope when we know that we are the architects of our own fortunes and that it is never too late to mend we feel strong and secure. We are glad that we are not at the mercy of a capricious God.

D : Has God no hand then in the workings of the law of *karma* ?

F : You may as well ask me whether God has no hand in the workings of the laws of nature. God works through laws. What we call a moral law or a natural law is only an embodiment of His will. At the same time, He never abdicates in favour of His law. Our scriptures call Him *Karmadhyakshah*—the Supervisor of the law. It is He that creates the world where each soul finds an environment suited to the tendencies it acquired in a former life. He is like the gardener who makes the seed-plots in his garden, and waters them. He helps the seeds to grow; but what they grow into depends upon their own nature.

D : Father, you said that all the inequalities of life are due to our own *karma* during former lives, and not to God. Did God create all souls the same in the beginning ?

F : Creation has no beginning, and souls were never created. According to our scriptures *Samsara* is *anadi* or beginningless. It ever depends on God who is eternal. Even at the end of a *Kalpa* or world-period, it exists in a subtle form.

D : So, if the law of *karma* prevails for ever, can we at any time interfere with it ?

F : I am surprised at your question. The law of gravity prevails for ever. But do we not interfere with it whenever we

go up a staircase? The law of *karma* simply states the conditions under which we have to work. It does not command us to work or not to work, any more than the law of gravity asks us to rise or to fall. Just as we erect buildings by interfering with gravity, so we can create future happiness for ourselves by "interfering" with the law of *karma*. I have already said that, within certain limits, we can alter our destiny even in this life.

D : But can we alter the destiny of others also ?

F : Yes, within certain limits. If a farmer by his own exertions is able to change the quantity and the quality of his crops, he can also influence the crops of his neighbour by precept, by example and by actual help.

D : If a man is suffering now for his bad *karma* in the past, why should we interfere and lessen his suffering ?

F : If it is his bad *karma* that brought on the suffering, it is his good *karma* that brings him help. We are the instruments of one another's destiny. And if we should fail to help the suffering man, somebody else would help him, and we should have to suffer for our hard-heartedness.

D : Is *samsara* then a judicial system by which every man rigorously gets his due ?

F : Not exactly; you cannot, for instance, call a family a judicial system because every child gets its due from a just and loving father, who is always ready and eager to help. It would be more correct to call *Samsara* an educational system, where the master allows the pupils to educate themselves by seeing the natural consequences of their doings, while he is present everywhere to advise, to help and to save.

D : How does God help us, and save us ?

F : If we surrender ourselves entirely to God, His grace can lift us away from the realm where the law of *karma* operates.

D : What ? Is there a place where the law of *karma* does not operate ?

F : Yes. I said that the law operates only in the moral universe. But behind the moral universe there is a spiritual universe, where all differences are reconciled, all conflict between good and evil ceases and our sinful disposition melts away in the grace of God. There the law of *karma*, except for *Prarabdha*, has no place. For, as the physical world is subject to the law of causation, and the moral world is subject to the law of *karma* so the spiritual world is subject to the law of love. The *Gita* teaches us that the spiritual progress of a man lies between two types of character—a *Sakta* and a *Yukta*. The former is one who works from attachment to the world. The latter is one who works from attachment to God. Both of them work, and work with zeal. But there is a world of difference in their motives, and hence in the consequences of their actions. The work of the man of the world results in bondage, as all actions good and bad, when they are directed by selfish desires, bind the soul to the wheel of *Samsara*. Whereas, the work of the man of God results in freedom, as all actions, when they are directed by a desire to co-operate with God, set free the soul. The law of *karma* does not bind *Iswara*, though He works incessantly for the maintenance of law and order in the universe. If we take refuge in Him and act in concert with Him in everything we do, we can escape from the realm of *karma* or retributive action. The *Gita* says :

"Whatsoever thou doest, whatsoever thou eatest, whatsoever thou offerest, whatsoever thou givest and whatsoever of austerities thou mayst practise—do that as an offering unto me.

"Thus shalt thou be free from the bonds of works which bear good or evil fruits. With thy mind firmly set on the way of renunciation thou shalt become free and come to me."

This kind of action is sometimes called *nishkama karma* or selfless action. It is also called *karma-yoga*.

D : Is *karma-yoga* then opposed to the law of *karma* ?

F : Not exactly. The latter is the raging surf of wind and waves, while the former is the calm, deep sea. *Yoga* takes us away from the strife of the moral world, where the law of *karma* prevails, to the peace of the spiritual world, where the higher law of grace prevails.

D : What is grace ?

F : Grace is the awakening of God in the soul. It is not something that operates from without. When we rouse ourselves to a sense of the in-dwelling God, and act in accordance with His will, we are said to be in grace. We are said to have entered the world of God.

D : Can the grace of God wipe out our past and forgive our sins completely ?

F : When we are in grace we never mind what fruits our sins have borne. Divine forgiveness consists not in wiping out our past, but in making us indifferent to its results. We lie on the bed we have made, as others do; but we are wrapped in the love of God that protects us against all its discomforts. Great devotees of God never feel the hardships of their lot in life. In their overpowering emotion they forget all their difficulties. For, they have gained entrance into a world where, according to the *Upanishad* "a blind man is blind no longer, a wounded man is no longer wounded, and a suffering man is no longer suffering."

D : Can we enter that world in this life ?

F : Yes, this very moment. It is to enable us to enter that world that all this moral discipline of the first ascent, which I have described is designed.

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND ASCENT

I

D : Father, I have come to trouble you again with questions. This is the day on which we have to meet according to our arrangement.

F : It is no trouble to me, my child. In talking to you I am learning more than teaching. In these dialogues I am, as it were, thinking aloud. We, Hindus, boast of being a religious people. Our ethics, our sociology, our polity and our art are all based on our religious philosophy. It is religion that gives the clue to our history. But, remember, religion is not a matter of more external observances. It is primarily a matter of conduct, knowledge and experience. Therefore, it is essential that every Hindu boy and girl should know clearly the essentials of their religion. They should understand and grip the framework of steel that lies underneath our bewildering sects and rituals. If they do not do this in time, they will become a prey in the end to superstition, which is the worst enemy of religion.

D : I am glad to hear, father, that I am not troubling you. You have put me on the path of light, and I want to explore it as far as I can. I will now proceed with my questions. Last time you said that moral discipline enables us to enter the spiritual world which is subject to the law of divine love and grace. I want to know whether moral life is not enough for the liberation of man.

F : My child, morality is not religion, any more than the gateway to a temple is the temple itself. No doubt, Hinduism insists on a man's acquiring moral purity and

becoming a *Dharmatma* in his first ascent to God. It teaches that he who has not made himself, by strenuous endeavour, pure in thought, word and deed, and who has not acquired the necessary *adhikara* or competence can never even know that there is a spiritual world. But in morality there is no finality or completeness. After every moral success we see a higher ideal which condemns once again our life of littleness and sin. Morality is like the horizon which ever recedes as we approach it. It always teaches us what we have not yet acquired, keeps us at arm's length and perpetually reminds us of our weaknesses. We are thus rendered helpless. And in our helplessness we crave for something which takes us out of ourselves, gives us the assurance of hope and makes us partake of a larger, purer and nobler life. This is religion.

D : So should morality always give place to religion ?

F : Morality always leads to true religion. And true religion always strengthens morality. When a man's religion results in or countenances an immoral practice, there is something wrong with it. Very often shady things put on the cloak of religion and stand in the way of morality. Therefore, when demands are made in the name of religion which outrage our moral sense and are inconsistent with the fundamental laws of humanity, as in the case of religious persecutions, it is clear that it is religion, and not morality, that must give way. We should carefully distinguish the truly religious man from the pseudo-religious man. The latter is far inferior to a moral man. But, of course, a truly religious man is superior to a merely moral man.

D : How is a truly religious man different from a moral man ?

F : You may as well ask me how the whole is different from the part. The moral man is like an honest mercenary, while the relgious man is like an ardent patriot. Both of them fight well. But the former fights for a small gain for himself, while the latter fights for his country, forgetting himself,

A merely moral life cannot give us the feeling of love. joy and exaltation and the spirit of courage and self-sacrifice which religious life gives. Mere morality cannot abolish our separateness and sin.

D : Does religious life abolish them ?

F : It does not exactly abolish them. It renders them ineffectual. God is the perfection of purity; and by fleeing and taking refuge in Him we leave our sinful selves behind.

D : But how can we flee to Him?

F : That is the whole problem of the second ascent we have to discuss today. The first ascent, as we have seen, is in society. The complex relations of men towards one another beat all around it. But when the summit is reached and the second ascent begins, the voice of humanity dies away in the rear. You have to travel alone. You see just a little light in the darkness, and it soon fades away, and there is darkness again.

D : Is He then at first like a fitful light ?

F : He is a constant light. It is we that are fitful. The eye of the flesh cannot see Him. And the eye of the spirit has to open itself, and acquire steadiness of gaze.

D : But how is this done ?

F : It is done by means of prayer, contemplation and love—in a word, by *bhakti*.

D : What exactly is *bhakti* ?

F : A great Hindu devotee—the author of the *Narada-Sutras* defines *bhakti* as an intense love of God, and says: "A man who loves God has no wants nor sorrows. He neither hates nor joys nor strives with zeal for any ends of his own. For through *bhakti* is he moved to rapture, and through *bhakti* does he attain peace, and is ever happy in spirit." The author goes on to describe *bhakti* as an "experience

pure and selfless, subtle, unbroken and ever-expanding. A man, who has once experienced it, will see that alone, hear that alone and speak that alone, for he ever thinks of that alone."

D : Does God respond to this intense feeling ?

F : Yes. The *prasada* or the grace of God is the response to man's *bhakti*. All great Hindu saints teach us that, as sure as day follows night, grace follows the cry of faith. The author I have quoted just now says: "Worship God at all times with all your heart, and with all your mind. Glorify him in your heart, and He will soon reveal Himself to you, and you will feel His presence." And Krishna says in the *Gita*: "To those that are devoted to me and worship me do I give the steady mind by which they come to me. Out of compassion for them do I dwell in their hearts and dispel the darkness born of ignorance by the shinirg lamp of wisdom."

D : You say that God reveals Himself to the worshipper. May I know how exactly He reveals Himself ?

F : He takes on the form you have chosen to worship. Krishna says in the *Gita*: "Howsoever men approach me, even so do I accept them." If you worship Him as Narayana, He will come to you as Narayana. If you worship Him as Siva, He will come to you as Siva. If you worship him as Devi, He will come to you as Devi. Or if you choose to worship any of the *Avatar* forms, He will reveal Himself as suoh to the eye of your mind. To Tulsidas He appeared as Rama, to *Chaitanya* He appeared as Krishna and to Sri Ramakrishna He appeared as the mother Kali. The *Gita* says: "Whatever be the form which a devotee seeks to worship with faith, I make his faith steadfast in that form alone."

D : Is not Narayana separate from Siva ? Are not Brahma, Vishnu and Siva subordinate to the great God, Narayana ?

F : No, my child. There is only one God. The Vedas describe Him by the neuter noun Brahman, for in Godhead there are no distinctions of sex. Sometimes He is simply called "That", for no human description can ever do justice to His infinitude. Brahman in relation to the universe is called Iswara; and Iswara is termed Brahma when He creates, Vishnu when He protects, and Rudra when He destroys. These names only denote the different aspects of the one God. That is why they are called the Trimurti—the one with three forms. The *Vishnu Purana* says: "The one and only God, Janardana, gets the designation of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva according as He creates, preserves or destroys. Of course, in popular religion these became separate gods with appropriate symbols., dwelling places, vehicles and followers.

The abstract ideas regarding the three different aspects of God were thus rendered concrete to the masses. At one time it was all a living symbolism.

D : What is the symbolism of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva having consorts of their own ?

F : A little thinking will make that clear to you. We have already seen that the supreme Iswara has the power of creating, preserving and destroying the world. This power is inseparable from God. As the sunlight is inseparable from the sun, as the power to burn is inseparable from fire, so is *Sakti* or the creative, protective and destructive power inseparable from God, the creator, protector and destroyer. Therefore, in popular religion it is personified and represented as the consort of *Iswara*. An important and widespread school of Hinduism in Northern India worships *Sakti* as the mother of the universe. *Sakti* is simply the active aspect of Iswara engaged in the creation, protection and destruction of the world. As Saraswati, she is the wisdom and the art of God. As Lakshmi, she is the grace of God that brings prosperity and happiness to some, and salvation to others. And as Uma, she is the virginal purity of mountains and forests. The *Devi-Bhagavata* describes her as sporting at the time of

the dissolution of the world, hiding within herself the types of all things.

D : Is it not very confusing to have the powers and functions of the one God thus divided and sub-divided and personified. ?

F : Well, I don't know. Do you think it is very confusing to call the ocean that surrounds our country by various names, as the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean not to speak of the Palk Strait, the Gulf of Cambay, etc. ? You should remember that Hinduism was developed under very complex conditions. Even in a small homogeneous community it is difficult to find a uniform religious formula that would satisfy the needs of all minds. What satisfies the young may not satisfy the old. What satisfies the labourer may not satisfy the scholar. It is nothing short of violence to thrust all minds into the same pigeon-hole of a formula. The difficulty is increased a thousand fold when the community is spread over a vast continent, and includes different races with varying levels of culture. Every one of the races that came within the fold of Hinduism had its own gods, its own rites and ceremonies and its own methods of worship. Hinduism had the difficult task of reconciling all these and finding their greatest common measure. But, fortunately, the formula that had already been discovered by the Vedic sages, namely, "*Ekam sad, vipra bahudha vadanti*" was elastic enough to admit any number of gods into the Hindu Pantheon, without doing violence to the deepest spiritual intuitions of the Aryan race. It is marvellous how, amidst the conflicting claims of various tribal deities and the clashing interests of different religious units and the confusing details of local customs and ceremonies, the integrity of the philosophy of the *Upanishads* is maintained. Out of the process of assimilation that went on for centuries in the Hindu fold we have developed two characteristically Hindu doctrines of *Ista-Devata* and of *Adhikara.*

D : What is the doctrine of *Ista-Devata* ?

F : Out of the numerous forms of God conceived in the past by the heart of man and recorded in our scriptures the worshipper is taught to choose one which satisfies his spiritual longing and make that the object of his adoration and love. This is his *Ista-Devata*. It may be one of the Trimurti, or one of the *Avatars* or one of the *myriad* forms of *Sakti*. Or it may even be a local or tribal deity rendered concrete to the eye of the flesh by means of an idol.

D : Father, is not idolatry a crude method of worship ?

F : It is wrong to call the Hindu worship of images idolatry. For Hindu scriptures do not say that the image that is recommended for worship is God. A well-known passage in one of the *Upnishads* says, on the other hand: "Of Him whose name is Great Glory there can be no image." Our scriptures clearly say that the *Pratika* or the substitute is not God, but only a means of making the mind dwell on God. They point out that, in this kind of *upasana* or worship, God is the object of worship, and that He is superimposed on the *Pratika* for the time being. He is duly invoked, superimposed and worshipped by means of the sixteen ritual acts (*sodasa upacara*) and restored again at the end to His true place in the heart. This method of worship is, therefore, recommended for the purpose of making one's devotion definite. An idol serves the same purpose to the common people as a flag does to an army. It focusses men's devotions, as a flag focusses men's martial valour. At the same time, Hinduism clearly lays down that mental worship is superior to the worship of images. But it must be admitted that all worship is at bottom idol-worship. Every form with which we invest the formless is an idol. The primitive man makes a scrawl of a head and arms on a piece of stone, and calls it God. The civilised man shuts his eyes and imagines a person with head and arms, and calls him God. Both are idols. The difference is not one of kind, but only one of degree. Hinduism has the courage to say so. And it has also the humanity to admit within its fold even those who cannot rise above grossly concrete forms of God.

D : Father, why are the forms of our gods and goddesses generally so unnatural with many arms and many heads ?

F : My dear, this is too big a question. To answer it I have to explain to you the ideals of Indian art. And the subject may lead us far beyond our present purposes.

D : But I am anxious to know it, father. Can you not explain it briefly ?

F : You are anxious to know everything from metaphysics to marbles.

D : Father !

F : Come, come. Don't be cross. I will explain it. But I must be very brief. Hindu art is quite different from Greek art which gives us such wonderful figures of physical beauty. The former, at its best, is ideal, social and hieratic. You should clearly understand these three terms. Firstly, it is ideal because it never cares to imitate the objects of the world, but aims at representing ideal figures and ideal forms. It reverses the common maxim that art is imitation of life. It believes, on the other hand, that life should be an imitation of art. The Hindu artist, whether he is a sculptor or a painter, represents the ideal world to which the actual world has to transform itself. He gives concrete shape to the noble and gracious characters that the epic poet has conceived. He reveals to the eye of the flesh the transfigured nature which the yogin sees in a vision. He is not concerned with the sordid details of every day life, but with the great actions of the gods or the mighty forces of evil that involve the fortunes of a world. His art is not, therefore, pretty or imitative. It is not realistic or naturalistic. We have no doubt some fine specimens of naturalistic art belonging to the early Buddhist period. But they do not represent the highest phase of Indian art. Secondly, our art is social, not individualistic. The conception of a separate individal self belongs to a lower order of reality, according to Hindu religious belief. Individuality, self-assertion and self-expression are, according to

us, signs of immaturity. The Hindu artist is accordingly concerned only with the ideals which tradition has handed down and which his community believes in. He carefully suppresses his own individual notions, idiosyncracies and eccentricities. He speaks in a language which is known to all. He employs a symbolism, the key to which is the possession of every member of the community. His genius is measured by the clearness, the ease and the adequacy with which he expresses in his medium the deepest aspirations of his people. His originality lies only in the transparency of his art, which is, therefore, classical in the best sense of the term. Thirdly, Hindu art is a hieratic art, because in its best moments it has always subserved a religious purpose. It has been the handmaid of religion. Its symbolism is, therefore, the symbolism of our scriptures.

D : What are the best specimens of Indian art that show these qualities you have described ?

F : The great compositions that are found in the cave temples of Badami, Ellora and Elephanta and the sculptural reliefs of Mamallapuram fully illustrate the features of Indian art that I have mentioned. The dance of Siva, the slaying of Hiranyakasipu by Narasimha, the shaking of Kailasa by Ravana, the killing of Mahishasura by Durga, and the penance of Arjuna are represented in them. They are not events that take place on the human plane. They are symbolic of the great cosmic forces, terrific or beneficial, in comparison with which man and his little world sink into nothing. In such compositions there is little room for naturalism or pettiness or anatomical correctness or a delicate sense of proportion. What the critic has to pay attention to is the energy, the feeling, the expression, the bold imagination, and the underlying idea. We have here colossal forms of good and evil, beauty and ugliness. Monstrous and terrific figures occupy the stage as much as grand and noble ones. Until we enter into the idea of each piece we are likely to regard many of the forms in it as hideous and repulsive. But when once we place ourselves

in the position of the artists and the congregations of the faithful for whom they were intended, we begin to see the lofty design and the grand purpose of these works of art, which, by their very nature, do not admit of artistic perfection. What applies to these great marbles applies to many, though not all, of the images in our temples.

D : So from metaphysics to marbles it is not a far cry.

F : Oh ! I see ! You are very sensitive, my child. I don't know how you will get on in life !

II

D : Father, you made mention of two characteristically Hindu doctrines—that of *Ista-Devata* and that of *Adhikara*. You have explained the first. We now come to the second. What is the doctrine of *Adhikara* ? You have frequently used that word in these dialogues in the sense of moral competence. Am I right ?

F : Yes. Moral and spiritual competence. The doctrine of *Adhikara* means that an ideal teacher (unlike myself) should adopt his teaching to the needs of his pupil. It is worse than useless to teach abstract philosophy to a man whose mind hungers for concrete gods. A labourer and a scholar, as I have already said, require two different types of religion. So instruction should be carefully graded. The skill of a teacher consists in discovering the next step which his pupil can take, and make him concentrate on that, and not waste his time on vague and abstract ideas. Thus he should lead him step by step.

D : Does Hinduism then insist on progressive *bhakti* ?

F : Yes. Krishna says in the *Gita*: "Even those devotees who worship the other gods with faith worship me alone, O Arjuna, but by the wrong method. I am, indeed, the Lord and the enjoyer of all sacrifices; but because they do not know me in truth they fall." Again: "The ignorant regard me, the unmanifested, as having manifestation. They do not know my supreme nature, the immutable and the transcendental." Accordingly, Hindu scriptures describe various degrees and forms of *bhakti*.

D : What are the degrees of *bhakti* ?

F : First of all, there is the broad division of *bhakti* into lower *bhakti* and higher *bhakti* — *apara bhakti* and *para bhakti*. The latter need not concern us now. For it consists of meditation on the formless and unmanifested Brahman, which is recommended for a man who has finished the second

ascent that we are now considering. It is the highest kind of *bhakti* of which only a few are capable. The *Gita* says: "The difficulty of those whose minds are set on the unmanifested is greater. For the path of the unmanifested is hard for the embodied to reach." The God of love is not the Absolute described as *Sat-Cit-Ananda* by the philosopher, but Iswara, the highest manifestation of that Absolute vouchsafed to the human spirit. For *bhakti* takes the path of least resistance and sails smoothly along the human currents of love and friendship, and carries us safe to the haven of God.

D : So contemplation on the unmanifested Brahman is *para-bhakti*, and the love of the manifested Iswara is *apara-bhakti* ?

F : Yes. *Apara-bhakti* or *Gauni-bhakti* is theistic faith. It assumes that the ultimate source of all things is a single supreme personality, who, being perfect in every way, should be the object of our love and adoration and who responds by His grace to our prayers. And there are several degrees in this type of *bhakti*. Sridhara, the learned commentator of the *Bhagavatapurana*, says that there are as many as eighty-one degrees. But for all practical purposes, it is enough if we recognise three degrees—*bahya-bhakti*, *ananya-bhakti* and *ekanta-bhakti*.

D : What is *bahya-bhakti* ?

F : *Bahya-bhakti*, as the word itself indicates, is external *bhakti*. It is the adoration paid to something outside ourselves. It is based in the unenlightened (*tamasa*) feeling that God is external to us, and that He dwells in a particular locality—a temple, a shrine or a holy bathing *ghat*. Our pilgrimages, our worship of images, symbols and sacred books are all examples of *bahya-bhakti*. Popular religion does not generally rise above this level.

D : What is *ananya-bhakti* ?

F : *Ananya* means not another. *Ananya-bhakti*,

therefore, is the exclusive and passionate (*rajasa*) worship of one's *Ista-Devata* in the heart. It is an intense monotheism. It clears the mind of the worshipper of many cobwebs of superstition, and gives a healthy direction to the spirit of devotion. To understand the purity and the beauty of monothesistic faith in the Hindu fold one should read the great *Ramayana* of Tulsi Das. But the danger of this type of *bhakti* is that it may give rise to bigotry and cruelty towards those who have different conceptions of God and different methods of approach. However, it must be said that the Hindu *ananya-bhakti* has rarely resulted in intolerance or iconoclastic zeal or religious massacres. The Hindu monotheist has always recognized that the gods whom others worship are only different forms of his own *Ista-Devata*.

D : And what is *ekanta-bhakti* ?

F : *Ekanta-bhakti* is the purest (sattvika) type of *bhakti*, for here the worshipper loves God for His own sake, and not for His gifts. In the other two types God is worshipped generally for the sake of the gifts, not necessarily material, that come in the train of His grace. When we suffer from want, when we are in pain and sorrow and when death snatches away our dear ones, we naturally fly to Him for refuge and pray for comfort and consolation. The Helper is always at hand waiting patiently. The peace He brings to us, when once He is allowed to come into our hearts, is so great that we gradually learn to crave for Him alone at all times, in prosperity as well as adversity. In fact, when He comes to dwell in us we become indifferent to external prosperity and adversity. His presence is our prosperity, and His absence our greatest adversity. When He is present we can tide over every difficulty. But when He withdraws Himself, as He often does even from His greatest *bhaktas*, we fall from the heights of illumination and creep along the miserable ways of routine and sin. In such periods of darkness we have to hold our souls in patience, faithfully discharge our duties and pray in solitude, as fervently as our heavy hearts allow us to do, for

the home-coming of the departed One. The author of the Narada-Sutras rightly points out that the mark of true *bhakti* is the consecration of all actions to Him and a feeling of anguish when His presence is withdrawn. He also gives us the following description of *ekanta-bhaktas*. "They ever converse with one another of their love with choking voice, with tears in their eyes and with a thrill in their bodies. Purified are the families of such men, and purified is their land. They make holy places holier, righteous actions more righteous and sacred books more sacred. For they are filled with His spirit. At their love the spirits of their forefathers rejoice, the gods dance, and the earth feels secure. There is no distinction among them of caste or culture, beauty or rank, wealth or profession. For His are they all." In a word, *ekanta-bhaktas* are those who are mad after God. They are dead to the world. They live and move in a radiant world of their own where all things are transfigured by a mystic light into the forms of the Divine Spirit. Hence they see all things in God, and God in all things. They feel the uncreated light in the heart.

D : You spoke of the forms as well as the degrees of *bhakti*. Now, what are the forms of *bhakti* ?

F : *Bhakti*, which is the feeling of the worshipper towards the worshipped, has a variety of forms, when interpreted in terms of human relationhip. Hindu *bhakti-sastras* describe nineteen different forms of *bhakti* of which the most important are five.

D : What are they ?

F : When God is conceived as a person, the feeling of the worshipper towards Him may be that of the servant to the master as in the case of Hanuman in the *Ramayana*. Such a type of *bhakti* is called *Dasya-bhava*. Or it may be that of the friend to the friend, as in the case of Sudama in the *Bhagavatapurana*. Such a type of *bhakti* is called *Sakhya-bhava*. Or it may be that of the parent to the child, as in

the case of Yasoda, the foster-mother of Krishna. Such a type of *bhakti* is called *Vatsalya-bhava.* Or it may be that of the wife to the husband, as in the case of Sita or Rukmini. Such a type of *bhakti* is called *Kanta-bhava.* Or, finally, it may be the romantic love of the beloved to the lover, as in the case of the Gopis like Radha towards Krishna. Such a type of *bhakti* is known as *Madhura-bhava.* A synthesis of all the nineteen types of bhakti is known as *Maha-bhava.* Indeed, love of God is like an ocean. And there are as many forms of it as there are gulfs and bays in an ocean. Theoretically, each *bhakta* has his own form of *bhakti*, as each man sees his own rainbow. But he should take care that his *bhakti* should be free from the inevitable limitations of the form.

D : What do you mean by the limitations of the form ?

F : What I mean is that *Dasya-bhava*, which resembles the love of the servant to the master, should not degenerate into servility. *Sakhya-bhava*, which resembles the love of the friend to the friend, should not degenerate into familiarity. *Vatsalya-bhava*, which resembles the love of the parent to the child, should not degenerate into sentimentality. *Kanta-bhava* which, resembles the love of the wife to the husband, should not degenerate into domesticity. And finally *Madhura-bhava*, which resembles the love of the beloved to the lover, should not degenerate into sensuality. It should not be forgotten that we are all spirits that have sprung from God, as sparks from a central fire, and that we are seeking to reunite with Him—each in his own way. Though the spirit has to accept the limitations of the flesh and work within those limitations, it should never be unmindful of its own essential purity and freedom.

III

D : But do our *Bhakti-Sastras* give any practical guidance to those who earnestly desire to lead a spiritual life ?

F : Yes. They not only analyse, as we have seen, the forms and degrees of *bhakti*, but also describe the ways and means of *bhakti*, and undertake to guide us to the feet of God.

D : What are the ways and means ?

F : First of all they are divided into *Bahiranga sadhana* or external means and *Antaranga sadhana* or internal means.

D : What are the external means ?

F: To this class belong offerings, vows, prostrations, reading sacred books, chanting hymns, repeating the Holy Name and seeking the grace of a Guru.

D : What is repeating the Holy Name?

F : In the later *Bhakti-Schools* of Ramananda, Tulsidas Vallabha, Nanak and Caitanya, repeating the name of the Lord and seeking His grace through that of a Guru are considered of very great importance. The name of the Lord (Satnam or Ramnam) is said to be as important as His form. The mystic utterance is the mediator betwen God and man. It is a revelation in speech of the unspeakable and the uncreated. Therefore, meditation on the name is calculated to fill the soul with devotion. Similarly the Guru is the mediator. He guides us in the ways of the Lord. Without a wise spiritual director who has trodden the paths himself and who knows the needs of our souls, it is difficult for us to reach our goal. Books and scholars make us only know about God. But a true Guru makes us know Him indeed through his own direct experience. His grace is, therefore, essential at the outset. It is the most potent of the external means.

D : And what are the internal means ?

F : The internal means are, mainly, renunciation (*vairagya*), knowledge (*jnana*) and the practice of Yoga.

D : Will you please explain these to me ir detail? How does renunciation help *bhakti*?

F : If *bhakti* or devotion is to result in supreme happiness, which the devotee feels when he lives in grace in the sight of his Lord, he has to pay a heavy price for it. God demands the highest sacrifice a devotee can offer. Though it is not necessary that a devotee should formally renounce the world, his internal renunciation should be real and final. He should become thoroughly dead to the world before he can become fully alive to God. We often resign, but with limitations. We often renounce, but with exceptions. We try to please God, but we also try to please men. Our hearts are lifted up to heaven, but they are not free from earthly taint. That is why so few of us are illumined.

D : But how can a man renounce all things before approaching God?

F : It is not necessary to begin with renouncing all things. I have only said that the highest *bhakti* demands complete renunciation. As a matter of fact, *bhakti* itself helps one in renouncing earthly pleasures. The *Gita* says: "The objects of sense fall away from the soul in the body when it ceases to feed on them, but the taste for them is left behind. Even the taste falls away when the Supreme is seen." Love of God and renunciation of the world act and react upon each other. Moreover, it is not so much our renouncing worldly things that matters, as our despising them in our hearts. For as the *Narada-Sutras* say, eat and drink we must as long as we are in the flesh. Only we should not indulge in these things or pay more attention to them than what is required. Every progressive devotee should, therefore, measure his love of God by his renunciation of the worldly spirit. Of course, this does not mean that he should leave his post of dnty, unless he feels a higher call. On the other hand, it means that he should discharge that duty as the loyal servant of God in a spirit of self-sacrifice and with no personal desire for any earthly reward. For no offering is so pleasing to God as our

hard, efficient, unrecognised and unrequited labour at the post to which He has called us.

D : Next to renunciation you mentioned *jnana* among the internal means. What exactly do you mean by *jnana*? I heard that *jnana* is higher than *bhakti*.

F : It is idle to dispute whether *jnana* is subsidiary to *bhakti*, or *bhakti* is subsidiary to *jnana*. It all depends upon the meaning we give to these words. I have used the word *jnana* here in the sense of mere religious knowledge. There is a higher *jnana* and a lower *jnana*, as there is a higher *bhakti* and a lower *bhakti*. The higher *jnana* is not different from the higher *bhakti*. The lower *inana* is the complement of the lower *bhakti*. Therefore, it is included among the internal means of *bhakti*. We have already seen that Hinduism insists on progressive *bhakti*. It expects us to proceed from *bahya-bhakti* to *ananya bhakti*, and thence to *ekanta-bhakti* and finally to *para-bhakti*. While preaching toleration towards all types of *bhakti*, Hindu scriptures never encourage *mudha-bhakti* or blind faith. A devotee, on the other hand, is expected to have an open mind and ever pray for light, so that he may possess more and more adequate conceptions of God. He should never forget that every human conception of God is imperfect. Therefore, he should ceaselessly try to make his own conception less and less imperfect. For this purpose it is necessary that he should carefully read the religious literature of his country and the great scriptures of the world, and keep himself abreast of the religious thought of his generation. But there is a danger here.

D : What is it?

F : Many people are apt to think that mere religious knowledge will save them. Religious knowledge is one thing, and religious experience is another. It is quite possible that you may learn all the technicalities of the Vedanta philosophy without ever possessing any spirituality. You may be an eminent theologian explaining to a wondering multitude all

the secrets of the kingdom of God. But if your heart has never been visited by the Divine Person, you are only a spy in the kingdom, and not a loyal citizen. If you have only religious knowledge you are like a man who has only one leg. With one leg you cannot even stand secure. Much less, therefore, can you walk to your goal.

D : And now, lastly, what is the practice of yoga?

F : The word 'yoga' is used in several different senses in our scriptures. It is used in the sense of power, prosperity, rule, devotion, endeavour, union and so on. The word literally means 'yoking'. In fact 'yoga' and 'yoke' are one and the same word. Therefore, yoga is used in the sense of union in the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. As all our sin and misery are due to our separation from God, we must come back to Him and be in union with Him if we want to have permanent happiness. This union is to be effected through disinterested action (Karma yoga), through loving devotion (*bhakti-yoga*) and through spiritual insight (*jnana-yoga*). But 'yoga', in a technical sense, is used to indicate not the goal of religious life, but the way. *Patanjali*, the author of the *Yoga-sutras*, was the first to systematise the practices of this technical yoga. He defines yoga as *citta vrtti nirodha* or restraining the functions of the mind. But the practices themselves had been in vogue in this country since the Vedic period. The *Upanishads* mention them. The Buddhist and Jaina scriptures approve of them and prescribe them. The *Bhagavad Gita* recommends them. Therefore, all our later *bhakti* scriptures accept them as legitimate means of concentrating our minds on God. Thus there is practical unanimity on the part of all Indian teachers of religion as to the utility of yoga practices.

D : But what are yoga practices?

F : Yoga is described as *astanga* or having eight accessories. Therefore, we have eight kinds of mental discipline, namely, *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*.

D : Will you please explain these in detail?

F : I will explain briefly what they indicate. For details you will have to read technical books on the subject. The first two, *yama* and *niyama*, indicate the preliminary ethical preparation necessary for a yogin. *Yama* is abstention. The *sadhaka* or the student should abstain from slaughter, falsehood, theft, incontinence and possession of property. Of these abstentions the most important is the first. All virtues are rooted in *ahimsa* or non-violence. But, as we have already discussed this cardinal virtue and all that it implies, we may pass on to the next discipline—*niyama*.

D : What is *niyama*?

F : *Niyama* is observance. It comprises purity (both internal and external), contentment, austerity, study of sacred texts and prayer to God. But these also we have already discussed under cardinal virtues and the other means of *bhakti*. Thus *yama* and *niyama*—abstention and observance—are intended for the moral training of the *sadhaka*. Then the next three—*asana*, *pranayama* and *pratyahara*—are also preliminary accessories to *yoga*.

D : What do these words mean?

F : *Asana* is the posture suitable for meditation. It is a physical help to concentration. After the preliminary moral training, a man should sit down in a convenient posture before he can concentrate his mind. *Patanjali* defines *asana* simply as the posture which is steady and comfortable—*Sthirrasukham-asanam*. Then the *sadhaka* should practise *pranayama* or regulation of breath. This consists of prolonged expiration (*recaka*), inspiration (*puraka*) and retention of breath (*Kumbhaka*). But these exercises have to be done under the proper guidance of a Guru. Else they may lead to danger.

D : But what is the use of *pranayama* ?

F : *Pranayama* is very beneficial to health, apart from its being a means to concentration. Respiratory exercises clear

the lungs, steady the heart, purify the blood and tone up the whole nervous system. The *yoga* system realises that the body is not a thing apart from the spirit, but its instrument and expression. Therefore, it aims at perfecting the body, as well as the mind and spirit. There is a false notion among some people that *yoga* aims at torturing the body. Far from doing so, *yoga* tries to produce *Kayasampat* or perfection of the body, which is said to consist in "beauty, grace, strength and the compactness of a thunderbolt." *Pranayama* also produces serenity of mind, which is very essential to contemplation.

D : Then what is *Pratyahara* ?

F : *Pratyahara* is retraction or withdrawing the senses from their respective outward objects. That is, the mind is to be shut against all impressions from the outside world. If this is done, it ceases to be affected by external influences. By these practices, the *Sadhaka* qualifies himself for contemplation. He has brought his body, his senses and his mind thoroughly under control. He is now fit to enter on the higher phase called *Rajayoga* comprising the last three acts of discipline—*dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*.

D : What is *dharana* ?

F : *Dharana* is the fixing of the mind on any particular object. It is concentration. The *Sadhaka* should concentrate his mind on some physical point or on the light in his own heart or on the form of his *Ista-devata* so as to gain perfect steadfastness. The mind thus concentrated passes on to *dhyana* or meditation, which is defined as an uninterrupted flow of thought towards the object of devotion. *Dhyana* results finally in *samadhi* in which all self-consciousness is lost and only the object of meditation shines forth. The mind loses its sense of identity and assumes the form of the object which it contemplates. Two degrees are recognised in *samadhi*—conscious *samadhi* and superconscious *samadhi*. In the former the object meditated on is still distinct from

the meditating subject; in the latter this distinction disappears. We are told that in the state of conscious *samadhi* the yogin attains marvellous super-normal powers(siddhis) of clairvoyance and clair audience, of thought-reading and thought-transmission and of knowing the past and the future. But the *Yoga-sastra* clearly points out that these super-normal powers are really obstacles in the way of *samadhi*. It is only by disregarding them and passing on that the yogin reaches his goal of union with God. Thus the yoga discipline, which aims at the purification of the body and the training of the mind in concentration, is a means of the vision of God.

D : Father, is it necessary that one should have recourse to all the ways and means of *bhakti* you have now described ?

F : My child, it is only for purposes of instruction that we divide and subdivide the *sadhanas*, as we divide and subdivide virtues. As moral life is one, so is religious life. There is only one way, as there is only one God. But there are several stages in it, and hence we have several names. All of them are more or less arbitrary, and exist only in our imaginations. Begin to lead a religious life, and you will be able, from your own experience, to add to or subtract from the lists of *sadhanas* given by the old masters. It is the spirit behind their instructions that we have to imbibe, and not the minute and indistinguishable details. The author of the *Sandilya-sutras*, after admitting that the subsidiary forms of devotion have to be adapted according to time and necessity, plainly says: "Isvara-tusterekopibali", that is, when God is pleased even one of the means is effectual. Therefore there is only one thing that is indispensable, and that is the grace of the Lord. You may practise all the external *sadhanas* and all the internal *sadhanas* without exception, you may steep yourself in religious literature and you may acquire the reputation of being a pious man. But all these are of no avail without the grace of God. There is an oft-quoted verse in the Upanishads which runs thus: "Not by study, not by intelligence and not by much learning is this *Atman* to be obtained. It can be obtained only by him

whom it chooses. To such a one the *Atman* reveals its true nature." This does not mean that grace is capricious. It only means that God is a searcher of hearts. We can deceive the world, we can deceive ourselves, but we can never deceive Him. He sees through all our studies, our clever arguments and our pious poses. He sees what sincerity there is in our hearts, and sends His grace accordingly.

D : So the grace of God depends entirely on man's sincere effort ?

F : Well, there is a difference of opinion among Hindu theistic teachers on this point. Some hold that man's *bhakti* has to cooperate with God's grace for salvation, as the young of the monkey have to make an effort and hold on to their mother, as she carries them over the branches of trees. While others hold that the grace of God is all-powerful and operates even without man's endeavour, as the cat carries its young from house to house without any effort on their part. The latter view has givien rise to the doctrine of *prapatti*.

D : What is *prapatti* ?

F : *Prapatti* means taking refuge. According to this doctrine man has only to throw himself on the mercy of God for salvation. It is idle to think of his own good works and knowledge as his qualifications. For what are they compared with his sins, and his ignorance ? The overwhelming sense of the littleness of man, compared with the ineffable, perfections of God, makes the worshipper exclaim: "I have taken refuge in Thee. Sinful and miserable as I am, be pleased to pick me up from the dust and set me up in Thy presence." To all such worshippers the *Bhagavan* of the Gita, in a grand utterance, makes the following reply :

"Renounce every rule of life and come into me alone for shelter. Sorrow not. I will release thee from all sins."

In another place He says :

"Having fixed thy thoughts on me, thou shalt surmount every obstacle by my grace, but, if from self-conceit thou wilt not listen, thou shalt utterly perish."

IV

D : In the verse you have just now quoted it is said that a devotee can surmount every obstacle by the grace of God. What are the obstacles in the way of a devotee?

F : A devotee has, of course, the usual difficulties in life which all men have as a result of disease, bereavement, adverse circumstances, unsatisfied desires, conflict of duties and a thousand other things. But all of them are not obstacles in his path. Some of them may even be his helps. For adversity keeps the soul awake, while prosperity often sends it to sleep.

D : What then are the real obstacles?

F : The real obstacles are of his own making. There is no recognised list of them. But we can get an idea of them from the numerous lives of the saints in our epics and *puranas*. They are mainly three, vanity, extravagance and loss of faith.

D : How can vanity stand in the way of a devotee who has renounced all earthly ambitions?

F : When a man ceases to be vain of his earthly possessions, and begins to lead a life of the spirit, he is generally tempted to be vain of his spirituality. When he ceases to look down on his poorer neighbours and tries to be religious, he begins to look down on those who are less religious than himself. He waxes indignant over the sins of others. He becomes harsh and intolerant. He becomes a moral pedant, a self-constituted censor, and a pitiless judge of men. Or, again, he is tempted to make a parade of his religiosity. He becomes anxious that his devotions should be known to all. He is pleased with the reputation he gets for spirituality, and is displeased when others do not recognize his merit. All this is not real religion, but only playing at religion to the gallery, in which, alas, many a youthful saint indulges. It will never do. If we want to have the grace of God, we must leave the limelight, we must step out of the theatre altogether. Not in vanity and pride, but in boundless humility and perfect

charity, will the grace find us. A true *bhakta* should be prepared to be ignored and despised. He should practise his devotions in secret, and should rather appear far less religious than he really is. He should never claim any respect or precedence for himself, but sit among the poor and the lowly. He should never draw attention to himself by any odd or eccentric ways. He should conduct himself as other men do. He should ever speak of all with great charity, dwelling on their virtues and ignoring their weaknesses He should be hard on himself, pitiless towards himself and angry with himself. But he should be gentle, kind and forgiving towards others. He should always endeavour to make himself pure, and others happy. And he should do all this with perfect naturalness and ease, and not as one who wishes to parade his humility and charity. For spiritual pride, in whatever form, is more deadly than earthly pride. It ruins the soul much more quickly than worldly vanity.

D : And then what is extravagance? That is the second obstacle you spoke of.

F : Yes. Extravagance is the next obstacle. A true devotee should be free from extravagance in all its forms. His devotion should neither be excessively emotional nor unnecessarily self-torturing. The *Gita* says :

"Yoga is not for him who eats too much, not for him who eats too little. It is not for him, O Arjuna, who is given to too much sleep, nor for him who keeps vigil too long. But in the case of a man who is temperate in his food and recreation, restrained in all his actions, and regulated in his sleep and vigils, Yoga puts an end to all sorrow."

Again, a true *bhakta* should avoid extravagance in his attitude to the traditional forms of religion.

D : What does that mean ? What is the correct attitude ?

F : It means that he should neither rest content with the mere external forms of traditional religion, nor go to the

other extreme, and set at nought all forms, and claim a dangerous freedom. Nothing kills the spirit of religion so effectively as a mechanical observance of forms through which men's devotions expressed themselves in a bygone age. We should never forget that God endures for ever, but that gods are subject to change and decay. To worship the dead gods is an insult to God. A true *bhakta*, therefore, should be able to rise above the forms from which the spirit has departed. But, at the same time, he should claim no freedom from the rules and regulations which continue to serve a spiritual purpose. He should not easily bring himself to believe that he is advanced enough to be a law unto himself. He should not set a bad example to his unenlightened fellow-men by setting at nought the forms of established religion. The *Gita* says: "Let no enlightened man unsettle the minds of ignorant men who are attached to their work. Himself doing all works with faith, he should make others do as well." If every beginner in religious life tries to discard the letter of the law in the name of the spirit, we shall have chaos in religion. And it is not good for the devotee either. For very often when the grace of God refuses to come into his consciousness, he has to fall back only on the rests and props of religion, namely, the temple, the offering, the ceremony, the book of devotion, etc.

D : Father, what do you mean by "the grace of God refusing to come into his consciousness ?"

F : Well, that brings us to the third great obstacle I spoke of — the loss of faith. An inexperienced devotee is often tempted to grow impatient when his devotions seem to lead him nowhere, when God hides His head, as it were, and a sense of weariness overwhelms him. Sometimes he has to pass through long stretches of time when religion seems to be a huge self-deception, and the spirit of cynicism makes grimaces at all his attempts at prayer. Sometimes even horrible, unspeakable sins, which normal humanity has outgrown, seem to be perilously near his soul. All the years of illumination,

of pious worship and the gracious presence seem to be rolled away in a moment, and in their place he has only despair and misery. The world, of course, goes on as usual. But to him it is a hard and petrified world with no meaning or purpose. He cannot pray. He cannot meditate. Even the favourite verses of his book of devotion become dull and monotonous with wearisome repetitions. These are moments which test the strength of a true *bhakta*.

D : What should he do then ?

F : He should hold on faithfully to his God in the gloom. He should never question His will, nor entertain the thought that he did not deserve this treatment. Many a man in this world would be religious, if religion always meant unclouded happiness. Religion is unclouded happiness in the end, when the goal is reached. But how many reach the goal before the clouds of mortality have cleared away ? An unbroken vision of God in this life is only for a few choice souls of humanity, the great religious founders of the world, the Saviours of our race. But, for the rest of us, when we try to walk in the ways of the Lord, there are many trials, many temptations, much hard work, and many tears, illuminated at rare intervals by flashes of a strange light, which is not of this world.

D : Are these the only obstacles in the way of a devotee ?

F : No. I have indicated to you only the most important and the most obvious of the difficulties in the path of religious life. These and many others are writ large on the lives of some immature *bhaktas* given in our *puranas*.

D : But, father, what about sin ? Does it come to an end with the first ascent ? Or does it pursue a man even in the second ascent ?

F : My child, in the first ascent, as we have seen, there is a perpetual struggle against sinful acts and sinful thoughts. The way there is full of pitfalls. The pilgrim frequently

tumbles down, and frequently rises up. Often he knows where danger lurks, and yet he rushes into the place voluntarily, and, of course, suffers for his folly. It is rather a gloomy path. But when he comes to the second ascent, the sun begins to shine clearly. The pilgrim feels exhilarated. His struggle against sin is now lifted up to a higher plane. He has no longer to fight against the sins of the flesh or the voluntary sins of thought. He is beset only by involuntary sinful thoughts. Like loathsome creatures, they often cross the path of the pilgrim, who simply shudders and passes on, for they do him no more harm.

D : Father, what are the distinguishing marks of a man who has successfully overcome all these obstacles of the second ascent ?

F : Don't you remember the description of the ideal *bhakta* given in the twelfth chapter of the *Gita* ? The *Bhagavan* says :

"He who hates none and has kindness and compassion for all, who is free from the feeling of 'I' and 'Mine', and who has forbearance, and looks upon pleasure and pain alike ;

"He who is ever content and steady in contemplation, who is self-subdued and firm of faith, and who has consecrated his mind and understanding to me — dear to me is the man who is thus devoted ;

"He from whom the world does not shrink and who does not shrink from the world, and who is free from joy and anger, fear and anxiety — he is dear to me ;

"He who has no wants, who is pure and prompt, unconcerned and untroubled, and who has given up all ambitions — dear to me is the man thus devoted ;

"He who neither joys nor hates, neither grieves nor wants, and who has renounced both good and evil — dear to me is the man thus devoted ;

"He who is alike to foe and friend and through good and ill repute, who is alike in cold and heat and in pleasure and pain, and who is free from attachments ;

"He who is alike in praise and dispraise, who is silent and satisfied with whatever he has, who is homeless and firm of mind — dear to me is the man thus devoted ;

"And they who with faith follow this immortal *Dharma* taught by me and regard me as the Supreme — surpassingly dear to me are they who are thus devoted."

CHAPTER IV

THE THIRD ASCENT

I

F : What is the matter, my child ? You are looking so solemn and melancholy today. Where is your usual cheerfulness gone ? Is anything worrying you ?

D : Nothing, father. I am rather anxious that we should finish these discussions as soon as possible.

F : Why, my child ?

D : Why ? Who knows what may happen ?

My mind may change, or I may leave you and find the way myself.

F : I don't think your mind will change, now that you have taken interest in the subject so far. This shows that you have got the religious spirit in you. And, as for your finding the way for yourself, I will rejoice when you do it. For the aim of all teaching, religious as well as secular, is to make the pupil finally independent of the teacher. Scriptures and teachers are only guides who show the way up to a certain point. But beyond that, the wayfarer has to trudge for himself, take risks, make mistakes, and learn the truth.

D : I am glad, father, you rejoice at my emancipation. But, before I take these risks and go alone, I want to hear you to the last and get all the instruction that you can give me.

F : But there is plenty of time, my child. You are only fourteen now. And, however precocious and clever you

may be, you cannot override nature. You have to wait, live long and learn by experience. The outlines of spiritual life I am giving you, have to be patiently filled in by you hereafter with details from your own experience, when your mind becomes fully developed.

D : Oh, leave that to me, father ! I will fare as God directs me.

F : Yes. There is always that mysterious factor—the will of God. A man may read all the scriptures of his religion, and get instruction from the best teachers in the land. But if the grace of God does not come to him, he can never be illumined.

D : Father, does grace come to a man only in his old age ?

F : Oh no. It may come to him at any time, or it may not come at all.

D : Did it not come to Prahlada and Dhruva when they were very young ?

F : Yes. It did. The *bhakti* of our previous lives may bear early fruit in this.

D : I am glad you say so, father. Now I should like to know the state reached by a man who has overcome in this life or in previous lives all the obstacles that lie in the path of religious life described by you the other day.

F : I have described *bhakti* as the second ascent in spiritual life. If a man traverses this and reaches the top of the second ascent, it means he is at the foot of the third.

D : What ? Is there another ascent still ?

F : Yes. Have I not already spoken to you of *bhakti* and *para bhakti* ? The former leads to the latter. *Para bhakti* or *jnana* is the third and final ascent in the spiritual life. But the difficulty here is the path is not clearly marked,

because it is very rarely trodden. And our guides are not agreed. So in what follows we will first take Samkara as our guide and traverse this difficult ascent, and then we will take Ramanuja and then Madhva.

D : But will you first of all explain to me how the two ascents you have so far described stand in relation to this third ascent ?

F : The moral discipline of the first ascent leads to the mental illumination of the second, which in its turn leads to the spiritual vision of the third. The first is a life of righteousness, the second is a life of devotion, and the third is a life of fruition. Just as at the end of the first we saw that morality was not enough, so at the end of the second we see that worship is not the final word in spiritual life. Religious experience, in the narrow sense of the term, is not the highest experience we are capable of. It is indeed true that most of us cannot rise above the level of religious consciousness. But there are exceptional souls who could rise above it to a mystic consciousness. Their experience cannot be ignored. Hinduism faithfully takes into account all types of spiritual experience and correlates them into a graded system. *Jnana* is the highest kind of experience which great *Risis* acquired after a prolonged life or lives of self-abnegation, prayer and spiritual quest. We therefore cherish it as a priceless possession and regard it as the goal towards which we have to progress.

D : What is the difference between religious experience and mystic experience ?

F : In all religious experience there is the same implication of duality as in ethical experience. We have seen that in ethical experience there is a perpetual distinction between the ideal and the actual. In religious experience also there is a similar distinction between a perfect God and an imperfect soul. And, as long as there is such a distinotion, we may take it that the goal is not reached. But in *jnana* or mystic experience there is no such distinction. Here, as in God,

knowing and being are one. Man knows God by partaking of His nature and becoming divine.

D : Father, we know the things of the world by means of our intellect. Is *jnana* by which we know God different from intellect ?

F : *Jnana* is something higher than intellect. It is intuition. It is, as it were, the fulfilment of intellect. Intellect deals with parts and gives therefore only partial or relative truths, *jnana* or intuition deals with the whole, and gives absolute truth. The findings of intuition are not opposed to those of reason. They include them. Intuition does not discard reason, but only supplements it.

D : Do you mean then that *jnana* leads us to a fuller knowledge of God than the intellect ?

F : Yes. There is no comparison between what *jnana* reveals and what intellect apprehends. *Jnana* is both knowledge of, and life in, God. When our *jnana-caksus* or the eye of wisdom is opened, we see ourselves as parts and parcels of an abounding divine life, of which no tongue of man can adequately speak. Our world of time and space then shrinks into a miserably small speck; and we are carried on the waves of a boundless Being, far beyond the little islands of morality and devotion.

II

D : But, father, I should like to know in what exactly this fuller knowledge consists. What more do we know of God through *jnana* in the final stage of spiritual life ?

F : Well, our fuller knowledge consists in knowing how little we really know of Him and how little we can know of Him. The feeling that comes over the pilgrim, when he leaves the ascent of *bhakti* for the higher ascent of *jnana*, is not unlike the feeling that came over Arjuna, after he saw the *Visvarupa*, or the universal form of Krishna described in the *Gita*. Arjuna exclaims :

"If, thinking thou art my friend, not knowing thy greatness, I addressed thee in ignorance or love as 'O Krishna, O Yadava or O Friend,' if in my mirth I showed no reverence to thee while playing or lying down or sitting or eating, alone or in the presence of others, I implore thee to pardon me, infinite and eternal Lord."

In the ascent of *bhakti* we know only a fragment of Him with reference to ourselves and our childish needs, and like children we affect to be on terms of familiarity with Father. But on the heights of *jnana* our eyes are opened, and we gradually come to see what He is in relation to the universe, and at last what He is in Himself. It is like a child of the royal house growing into a man and coming to know that the father whom he loved and played with hitherto is in truth the great Ruler of an empire, the Lord of life and death, whose will is law to unnumbered nations. *Jnana* reveals to us the unsuspected heights of grandeur and glory at which we are struck dumb. We come to see that all our boasted knowledge of Him is only ignorance.

D : Is God then entirely unknowable ?

F : No. It is scientific agnosticism, and not Hinduism, that says that God is unknowable. Agnosticism disclaims all knowledge of spiritual existence, whether God or soul.

Agnostics say that behind the physical life of the world there may be a God and that behind the mental life of man there may be a soul, but that both of them are unknowable. They say that our knowledge is confined to the field of matter and energy. But Hinduism teaches that God is not only infinitely higher than ourselves, but also infinitely near to ourselves. He is nearer to us than our hands and feet. For He is the soul of our souls. He lives in our hearts. He is the canvas on which we shine as painted pictures. He is the very ground of our being.

D : Then why do you say that the highest wisdom consists in our knowing that we can know very little of Him ?

F : For, though He is present in all of us, we have to cease to be ourselves before we can know Him as He is. We have to learn to transcend time and space. For God lives not only in time, but also beyond time. He is not only immanent, but also transcendent. So how can we, poor creatures of time, form adequate notions of Him who is timeless. Any statement that we may make of Him, any virtue that we may attribute to Him, must fall infinitely short of the reality. After ascribing to Him the highest qualities that we can conceive, we have to add: "Not simply these, but something higher." Therefore the wisest of the Hindu sages declared that the only adequate description of God is "*neti*, *neti*" — not this, not this. Accordingly, in Hinduism we have a two-fold conception of God as *Saguna Brahman* or *Isvara*, endowed with all the good and glorious qualities that we can think of, raised to the degree of infinity, and *Nirguna Brahman*, the unqualified Godhead which can only be described in negatives. Take, for instance, the following passage from the *Gita* :

"He shines with the faculties of all the senses, and yet He is devoid of senses. He is unattached, and yet He sustains all things. He is without the dispositions of nature, and yet He enjoys them. He is without and within all beings.

He has no movement, and yet he moves. He is too subtle to be known. He is far away, and yet He is near."

D : Are not these contradictory conceptions of God?

F : No, they are complementary conceptions. Suppose you raise your naked eyes to heaven to look at the midday sun. You are dazzled and cannot look at him. Then you use a smoked glass and see him as a red, round globe. The sun you saw at first is not different from the sun you see now. The same sun is blazing in the sky. Similarly the Absolute in itself is called *Brahman*. The Absolute in relation to the world, or viewed through human spectacles, is *Isvara*. The former is impersonal, the latter is personal.

D : Then is *Isvara* merely a projection of ourselves, and not a reality ?

F : How can you say so ? Is the red globe that we see through the smoked glass in place of the sun a projection of ourselves? *Isvara* is the best image of *Brahman* that we can possibly get under our human conditions of knowledge. It is the only way in which the Absolute can appear to the human mind.

D : Then we cannot say that God is both *Nirguna* and *Saguna*. He is *Saguna* to us because of our limitations.

F : You are right, my child. It is not quite accurate to say that God is both *Saguna* and *Nirguna*. We cannot say that the midday sun is at the same time both blazing and not blazing. It is blazing in itself, but not blazing to us when we look through a smoked glass.

D : You said that the Absolute is impersonal. Do you mean to say that God is not a person ?

F : It all depends upon what we mean by personality. If by personality we mean something finite and limited, then, of course, God is not a person. Usually personality implies the existence of some other being differentiated from the person

referred to. Therefore it can belong only to one who stands in some relation to others outside himself. Such a condition cannot obviously apply to God, who is the Absolute, and who is the All. There can be nothing outside God and differentiated from Him. He is not a person standing over against other persons. He is an indivisible spirit present in all persons. He is the unifying principle behind all creatures. Therefore it is only in an unusual sense that we can use the expression 'personality of God', by which we can only mean the highest conception of God that we, finite beings, can have of Him. To avoid the ambiguity we say that the Absolute in itself is impersonal. The conception of God which the man in the street generally entertains is grossly anthropomorphic.

D : What is anthropomorphic ?

F : 'Anthropomorphic' means 'having human form.' The man in the street imagines God as simply a glorified man. As a man eats, enjoys, fights and marries, so does his God eat, enjoy, fight and marry. As a man brings up a family and looks upon his eldest son as his right-hand man in managing his estate, so does his God. As a man pursues and kills his enemy, so does his God. All the ceremonies of popular religion in all countries are designed on this principle. It is repugnance to this rather vulgar religious sentiment that peoples heaven with a host of gods who love and beget that made some of the great minds of the world, like Buddha, silent on the subject of God. Even the God of the *Gita*, who is tenderly tolerant towards all forms of worship, however imperfect they are, says: "Fools not knowing my immutable and transcendental nature think that I, the unmanifested, am endowed with a manifest form." But, as men's minds improve, their conception of God becomes elevated, and many of the anthropomorphic traits are gradually dropped. By slow degrees God comes to be known as a spaceless and timeless Being. But even the most cultured of us, for the simple reason that we are men, have to conceive of God, for purposes of religious worship, in terms of personaltiy

and interpret our sentiments towards Him in terms of human affections. Else a great spiritual want would be left unsatisfied. At the same time we owe it to the Supreme Spirit that in our moments of insight we impose on it no such limitations as we are suffering from. We should clearly recognise that God, who is an object of our worship and knowledge, cannot be the Absolute who is above such distinctions as object and subject. We should fearlessly admit that, after all, theism is only a glorified anthropomorphism. That is why our Hindu sages would not stop at this halfway house, but go forward and try to see God as He is, and not simply as He is to us.

D : Father, if the Absolute should be described only by *neti, neti*—not this, not this—is it not a mere negation or emptiness.

F : It is not the Absolute that is empty, but our poor human conception of it. All that we mean, when we say of the Absolute that nothing could be predicated of it, is that it is wholly other than what we know in the world. We do not mean that it is a negation or non-being. It is a negation of every positive thing we know. But it is not absolute negation. In other words, we are qualified only to speak of what the Absolute is not, but not of what it is It is an ineffable Reality, which makes every kind of existence possible in the world. It is like the unseen money in the imperial treasury, which gives the paper currency of a country what value it has. We do not know in what form the money is in the treasury. We have not seen it. But we know that it is there, and that from the fact of its being there the currency notes that pass through our hands derive their value. Similarly, we know that our Absolute exists, and that all moral and spiritual values are derived therefrom. That is why, as the *Gita* points out, all our acts of sacrifice, charity and meditation are begun with the formula '*Aum Tat Sat*' which signifies that God is the ultimate Reality from which all our moral and spiritual values are derived.

D : What is *Aum* ?

F : The sacred syllable '*Aum*' stands on all our religious literature for the Absolute Brahman. The *Katha Upanishad* says :

"The word which all the Vedas proclaim and which all austerities declare, and desiring which men lead a life of chastity—that word I will tell thee briefly. It is *Aum*. This syllable is indeed Brahman, this syllable is indeed the highest."

And the *Mandukya Upanishad*, which gives a full exposition of the symbolism of *Aum*, begins thus :

"*Aum*—this syllable is the whole world. Its further explanation is—the past, the present, the future, everything is just the syllable *Aum*. And whatever else transcends the threefold time—that too is just the syllable, *Aum*."

So '*Aum*' is the symbol of the Absolute. Hence it is considered the very essence of the Veda.

D : Father, can we assert nothing about the Absolute, represented by *Aum*, except that it exists ?

F : Well, strictly speaking, nothing more can be asserted. For we cannot assert anything without excluding from it what is opposed to it. And the Being from whom something is excluded cannot be called Absolute. However, we speak of the Absolute as being *sat*, *chit*, *ananda*.

D : Father, I have often heard these words repeated. What do they mean?

F : *Sat* means existence, *chit* means intelligence, and *ananda* means bliss. The whole formula, *sachidananda*, simply means that the Absolute exists, it is pure spirit, and it is perfect. In other words, *sachidananda*, as applied to *Brahman*, means that it is a spiritual perfection.

D : Father, you sometimes speak of God and sometimes speak of the Absolute. What is the difference?

F : When we speak of Him as distinct from the world we generally use the term God or *Isvara.* But when we speak of Him as including everything, we use the term the Absolute or *Brahman.*

D : If the Absolute is perfect bliss how can He contain within Him this world which is so full of evil and misery? Is He not affected by these? In the first place, why does He allow them to exist?

F : Evil is inherent in the world. It is a necessary element. For it is the opposition of the finite to the infinite. The infinite is, as it were, imprisoned in the shell of the finite. It has to break the shell, undergo pain and suffering before it comes to its own. Just as a child learns to walk by frequently falling down and crying, we have to attain to perfection by overcoming evil. Thus evil is essential to our moral and spiritual growth. Hence it is a permanent factor in a growing world. It has to exist as long as there is a single finite being to be reclaimed to infinitude. It may be compared to the shadow which an opaque object casts when it is exposed to light. The shadow vanishes when the opaqueness gives place to transparency. Similarly, evil vanishes when the finite becomes infinite.

D : But a shadow is unreal. Is evil also unreal?

F : Evil is real to us. But it has no reality in the Divine Being. Sri Ramakrishna once compared God to a serpent, and evil to its poison. What we call poison is no poison to the serpent. It is a normal healthy secretion. The serpent does not die of its own poison. Therefore we say that evil is not ultimately real. Accordingly, the greatest Hindu poet of our day thus writes of pain :

"She is the vestal virgin consecrated to the service of the immortal perfection, and when she takes her true place before the altar of the infinite she casts off her dark veil and bares her face to the beholder as a revelation of supreme joy."

Now you will understand why in the Hindu conception of Godhead there are no normal attributes. No evil, no morality. Morality always involves an antithesis. It is what it is in contrast to it opposite. Moral good is called good only when it is in the process of formation. But when it is fully formed, it ceases to be good owing to the absence of evil. It can only be called the perfect, which we indicate by the word '*ananda*'.

D : But what is the difficulty in believing that evil is ulimately real ?

F : Don't you see at once that such an assumption would lead to the conception of a finite God? If evil were ultimately real, it could never be destroyed. And a God, who is powerless against evil, is not God. Moreover, if evil were something real, opposed to God and outside Him, how can we depend upon Him for success in our moral enterprise ? What guarantee is there that good would ultimately succeed in the world struggle ?

D : But does not God fight against evil ? Does he not come down in the form of an *Avatar* when evil becomes excessive ?

F : Yes. But we have to remember the distinction between *Brahman* and *Isvara*. It is the latter that fights against evil, for He is the guardian of eternal *Dharma*. He is ever at war with evil in the universe which is the theatre of the strife. But, when the opposition between the finite and the infinite ceases, and the Absolute Brahman returns, as it were, into His original wholeness, evil disappears. It is because the fighting *Isvara* is only *Brahman* viewed through human spectacles that we have a guarantee that good will ultimately succeed.

D : What do you mean by the opposition of the finite and the infinite in the universe.

F : The finite is matter, the infinite is spirit. Hindu philosophers call the former *anatman* and the latter *atman*.

The universe is a battlefield where there is perpetual war between these two. The struggle has so far expressed itself on this earth in the form of minerals, plants, animals and men. From matter to life, from life to consciousness, from consciousness to reason, we see the progressive conquest of *atman* over *anatman*. The whole course of evolution consists in the spirit struggling to come to its own. The struggle is, of course, still going on. Evolution is not yet complete.

D : What would it be when it is completed ?

F : The final stage would be the rendering of all matter into spirit. It is the return of the Absolute into itself. But that is only an ideal like the original separation of the Absolute into matter and spirit ?

D : What ? Is it the Absolute itself that became originally separated into matter and spirit ?

F : Yes. The Absolute appears in the universe as the inseparable two — matter and spirit, object and subject, *anatman* and *atman*. These imply each other. They are the sundered parts of an original whole. And the history of the universe is simply a process of the sundered parts getting back to the original wholeness. Therefore true progress is always to be measured by the supremacy of spirit over matter.

III

D : Father, you say that the Absolute sunders itself and appears as subject and object or spirit and matter, and that in the end these coalesce and again become the Absolute. Why does the Absolute do this ?

F : My child, who can tell ? We may as well ask ourselves: "Why does fire give out heat and light ? " It is the nature of the Absolute to manifest itself in the world as the inseparable two, just as it is the nature of fire to give out heat and light.

D : Is there no motive then for the creation of the world ?

F : What motive can we ascribe to God without impairing His perfection ? He has nothing to attain which He has not already attained. He has nothing to desire which He does not already possess. We can therefore only say that it is His *lila* or pleasure to manifest Himself in the world, as it is an artist's pleasure to manifest himself in a work of art. But, from our point of view, we may say that by this process He creates opportunities for souls to work out their destinies.

D : Father, if the world is a manifestation of God, can we not say that the world is God ?

F : No. We cannot say that the world is God, any more than that the *Ramayana* is Valmiki. No doubt, God is immanent in the world. But His immanence does not mean that He is to be identified with the world. It is Pantheism, and not Hinduism, that identifies God with the universe.

D : What is Pantheism ?

F : Pantheism is a philosophic theory that assumes that this universe of ours is an exhaustive manifestation of God. It is a half-truth like Deism, another philosophic theory, that assumes that the Creator is entirely outside His creation. Pantheism emphasises the immanence of God to the exclusion of His transcendence, while Deism emphasises the transcendence

of God to the exclusion of His immanence. Hinduism is neither Pantheism nor Deism. According to it, God is both transcendent and immanent. He is in the world and also beyond it. He is its material cause as well as its efficient cause. He is the clay as well as the potter. Hence Hindu scriptures compare the world to a spider's web, the threads of which come out of the spider itself. But the web is not the spider. Similarly the world is not God. The finite manifests the infinite, but it does not manifest the whole of the infinite. The God of the *Gita* says that the whole universe is sustained by a part of Himself, and that it lives in Him, and not He in it. Also, while admitting that all things are divine, Hinduism recognizes that some things reveal God more than others. A plant is more divine than a mineral, an animal is more divine than a plant, a man is more divine than an animal, and a good man is more divine than a bad man. Thus from the lowest atom of dust to the highest *Isvara*, all are in God, but all are not equally divine.

D : So does the existence of the world mean that at one time a small fraction of the infinite became finite ?

F : We cannot say that. For the relation of whole and part does not apply to the Absolute who is the All. When we speak of God as the whole, and the world as the part, we only use a figurative language which is not strictly true.

D : Do you mean to say, then, that neither the whole of the Absolute nor a part of the Absolute has become the world?

F : Yes. For if we say it is the whole, then the Absolute becomes the world, and all our search for God beyond this finite world becomes futile. If we say it is the part, then we apply to the Absolute the relation of whole and part which is inapplicable to it.

D : How then do you explain the origin of the world ?

F : Well, we cannot exactly explain how this changing, finite world of ours came into existence, nor how it is connected

with the unchanging, infinite *God.* The Gita, speaking of the world-tree, says :

"Its form is not here perceived as such neither its end, nor its origin, nor its existence."

Various theories of creation have been put forward by different schools of Indian thought.

D : What are they ?

F : The most important of them are *Arambha-vada*, *Parinama-vada* and *Vivarta-vada.*

D : What is *Arambha-vada* ?

F : The theory of the *Nyaya-Vaisesika* school of philosophers is known as *arambha-vada*. According to it, at the beginning of a *kalpa*, invisible and intangible atoms of different orders, under the influence of the will of God and the destiny of souls, unite to form the various objects of the world, differing in their qualities from the atoms themselves. Thus the effect is entirely different from the cause. It comes into being anew, as a cloth comes into being anew when the threads are put together. The atoms combine with one another and continue in combination giving rise to the various objects of the world for some time, and then they separate so that the whole effect collapses. This process of creation and destruction goes on till the time of *mahapralaya* or final dissolution. Such is their theory.

D : What is *Parinama-vada* ?

F : The theory of the Samkhya school is known as *parinama-vada*. It is a theory of evolution. According to this, the universe consists of two eternal realities, one conscious and the other unconscious. The former is called *Purusa* and the latter *Pradhana*. There is an infinite number of *Purusas*, all independent of one another and devoid of any qualities. They are the silent spectators of the various modifications of *Pradhana*,

D : What is *Pradhana* ?

F : The *Pradhana*, otherwise called *Prakrti*, of the Samkhya system is either universal matter or universal energy. It has three *gunas* or dispositions, namely, *sattva* or goodness, *rajas* or passion and *tamas* or dullness. When these three are in equilibrium, *Pradhana* is quiescent. When this equilibrium is disturbed by the presence of souls, the *gunas* act on one another and we have evolution. And this gives rise to the following : *mahat* or buddhi which means cosmic intellect; *ahamkara* or self-consciousness; the five so-called *tanmatras* of sound, touch, smell, form and taste; the *manas* or mind; the five organs of cognition; the five organs of action, and finally the five gross elements of ether, air, light, water and the earth. The evolving *Prakrti* is in itself blind and unconscious, but all its activities are purposive, the purpose being the fulfilment of what is conceived as the destiny of souls. At the end of a *kalpa* or world-period the world is dissolved, and the three *gunas* of *Pradhana* come into equilibrium again. The Samkhya theory is an improvement on that of the *Nyaya-Vaisesika*. For it postulates only two ultimate realities, while the latter postulates a number of ultimate realities. The *Vaisesika* system, by the way, is in itself an improvement on Buddhistic *nihilism*, which declares that nothing is real or permanent. Again, while according to the *Nyaya* theory, as we have seen, the effect is different from the cause, according to the *Samkhya* theory the effect is inherent in the cause. It is only made manifest by evolution, as oil is made manifest when the oil-seed is pressed.

D : And what is *vivarta-vada* ?

F : This is a theory of appearance and reality. According to some schools of Vedanta, the cause, without undergoing any change in itself, produces the effect. Threads have to be woven together to produce a cloth. Oil-seeds have to be pressed together for oil to come out. In both these cases the cause undergoes a change. So these analogies will not do to explain creation in which the Creator remains unaffected by the

process. Therefore some philosophers use the well-known figures of a rope appearing as a snake in the dark, a pillar as a ghost, a piece of shell as silver, and a sandy desert as a mirage. The rope, the pillar, the shell, and the desert are realities, while the snake, the ghost, the silver and the mirage are only appearances. The different illustrations used are intended to indicate the dependence of the effect upon the cause, and, at the same time, the changelessness of the cause. What is really God appears to our finite intelligence as the universe of time and space, just as a piece of rope appears in the twilight as a snake or a pillar appears in the dark as a ghost. When we come to feel that it is only a rope or a pillar, we no longer fear it, we no longer run away from it. Similarly, when we come to realise God, we are no longer troubled by appearances of the world. When *avidya* or the veil of misapprehension is removed by *Vidya* or divine knowledge, when *mithyajnana* or false knowledge is replaced by *samyak darsana* or true perception, we rise to a higher order of reality, as a dreamer rises into waking life. This is a matter of spiritual experience and all the mystics of the world have borne testimony to it. But how exactly the reality is conncected with the appearance we are not in the present stage of our knowledge able to see. The relation is therefore said to be *anirvahaniya* or indefinable. God, by His *maya*, brings about this wonderful phenomenon of creation.

D : What does *maya* mean? Does it not mean illusion? If so, is this world unreal?

F : It is some Buddhist philosophers that preached that the world was unreal. Their opinions were condemned as heritical. No orthodox Vedic school ever supported the theory of illusionism, according to which nothing really exists outside our minds. On the other hand, we distinguish three stages in Hindu philosophy in the treatment of this question of the reality of the world. The first stage of development is seen in the theories of *Nyaya-Vaisesika* which analysed the facts of the world and reduced them, as we have already seen, into a number of *padarthas* or categories. The second stage of

development is seen in the theories of *Samkhya-yoga*, which further reduced them to the two well-known categories of *Prakrti* and *Purusa*. The third stage of development is seen in the theories of the various schools of Vedanta that tackle the question whether it is not possible to reduce the two to one. The systems of Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka and Vallabha teach that the world is real, but dependent on God in one way or another. Thus one of the two categories is made subordinate to the other. Samkara goes a step further. He does not deny the reality of the world, as he is often supposed to do. Far from teaching such a doctrine, he takes pains to refute the Buddhist theory of illusionism. According to him, the world is as real as you and I are real. A subject implies an object, and an object implies a subject. Each depends upon the other. If the perceiving subject were entirely independent of the objective world, he would move in a phantom world of his own creation. And if the objective world were entirely independent of any perceiving subject, it would be a chaotic world of dark forces and vibrations, and not a world of light and colour, or of law and order. The former view leads to a fanciful idealism, and the latter to a crude realism. The world is emphatically not an illusion. It exists in its own right, as the human mind exists in its own right. As long as the mind is real, the world also is real. But both belong to a lower order of reality than the Absolute. They are only relatively real, while God is Absolutely real. Let me take an illustration. Have you read Kalidasa's *Sakuntalam* ?

D : Yes, father. I have read the Telugu translation.

F : Well, any drama will suit my purpose. In Kalidasa's play in the first act we see that King Dusyanta enters the hermitage of Kanva and sees Sakuntala and her companions watering the plants. Does the king look upon the hermitage as an illusion? Does he treat Sakuntala and her companions or himself as phatnoms?

D : No, of course not.

F : But are not the characters really the phantoms of the poet's brain? Is not the hermitage of *Kanva* a sweet dream of Kalidasa? You see there are two orders of reality here. Dusyanta and his fellow characters on the one hand, and Kalidasa and his readers on the other. Within the limits of the drama everything is real—plot, situation and characterisation. But the dramatist belongs to a higher order of reality. From his standpoint, the characters are only ideal creations. Similarly, from the standpoint of God, we and the world in which we live are unreal. But among ourselves and realtively to one another we are terribly real. The world is there external to our minds. But there is nothing external to the mind of God.

D : But do not our scriptures sometimes describe the world as a dream?

F : Yes. But to whom is the world a dream? Not certainly to the man of the world. A dream is no dream to the dreamer. It is a terrible reality to him. It is only to the awakened man that it is a dream. Similarly, it is not to the man of the world, but to the Yogin in his *Samadhi* when he identifies himself with the changeless Reality, that the world seems unreal. We are all of us in a world which is real to us; but we aspire to the attainment of a world, which the Veda reveals to us, and in which this will-o-the-wisp of a world, with its deceits and lies, its cruel *mockeries* and temptations, will not bewilder us any further.

D : You say then that *Maya* is not merely illusion, as it is generally understood?

F : Yes. That is what I have tried to explain.

D : Then what is *Maya*?

F : *Maya* is, strictly speaking, a mystery. It is the indefinable power by which God, while remaining Himself changeless, appears as the changing universe. That is why we sometimes say that *Maya* is the cause of the world, and that it is the same as *Prakrti*. And, as it is only to finite

beings like ourselves that God so appears, our finiteness is also called *Maya*. Thus *Maya* is both subjective and objective. The subjective aspect is also called *avidya*.

D : What exactly is *avidya* ?

F : *Avidya* is the natural disability of the soul which prevents it from apprehending God as He really is. Man as man can never know God. He should transcend his *upadhis* and become divine to know the Divine Being.

IV

D : What are *upadhis* ?

F : *Upadhis* are the limitations of our souls. They are simply the physical, mental and moral conditions under which we have to work in life. Their exact analysis is a matter of science, and may change from time to time. The ancient psychologists of India analysed them thus. There is first of all, the gross body which is made up of various elements and which the soul casts off at death. But destruction of the physical body does not bring freedom to the soul. For, even after death, it is still enclosed by a subtle body, with which are associated the subtle organs of perception and action, the mind, and the vital breath. The soul wanders through the mazes of *samsara* always with this psychic equipment, its course being determined by the merit of its deeds. Till the *upadhis*, which are imposed on it by *avidya*, are transcended by means of *vidya* or spiritual insight each soul imagines that it is separate from other souls and separate from God. Man deludes himself into the belief that he is an independent unit. Hence he is subject to birth and death.

D : Are not souls really separate from one another ?

F : Souls are as separate from one another as the islands in the ocean, or the leaves on a tree. The islands in the ocean appear as separate places with different physical features and different vegetable and mineral products. But we know that deep down in the ocean they are all connected together by land. Without that internal connection they can never stand. So also individual souls. For all practical purposes the individual is a separate unit. He is a moral agent. He sins and falls. He does good, and is raised. As he sows, he reaps in this world or in the next. But his salvation lies in his final transcending his individuality. At first sight we may all seem to be rigidly apart from one another. But a moment's consideration will show how we understand one another, love one another and enter into

one another's mind. This sense of unity, raised to its maximum, constitutes the mystic vision of the living unity of all creation. Thus what we deny is not the existence of the individual soul, but its ultimate reality as a separate and independent unit. When the limitations of body, mind and understanding are removed the individual is no longer an individual, he becomes one with the infinite spirit, just as when a closed jar or pot is broken the space hitherto enclosed becomes one with the infinite space. Accordingly, as on the question of the reality of the world, we have here also a higher view and a lower view. The lower view, namely that there are separate individual souls, is not a false view. It is only a partial view. It gives one aspect of the truth, not the whole truth. Error comes in only when we mistake what is relatively real for what is absolutely real.

D : Is it also an error to think that our souls are separate from God ? You said that that was also a part of *Avidya.*

F : Yes. Every individual soul is only a focus, as it were, in one infinite consciousness. Or it is a point in the universe where the veil of time and space is so thin that we see the infinite spirit behind.

D : Is the soul then a part of God?

F : No. For, as we have seen, the conception of part and whole does not apply to God.

D : Is it then a form or modification of God ?

F : No. For God cannot really be subject to any change or modification.

D : What then is its relation to God ?

F : When the *upadhis* are removed, what we call the individual soul is identical with the universal soul.

D : Is that the logical conclusion ?

F : It is not a mere logical conclusion. It is the highest teaching of the Veda. The ultimate identity of the soul and God—of the individual soul and the universal soul—is

established by four *mahavakyas* or great utterances taken from the four vedas.

D : What are these *mahavakyas* ?

F : The *Aitareya Upanishad* of the *Rig Veda* says, "*Prajnanam Brahma*" or "Intelligence is Brahman". The *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* of the *Yajur Veda* says, "*Aham Brahmasmi*" or "I am Brahman". The *Chandogya Upanishad* of the *Sama Veda* says, "Tatvamasi" or Thou art That". And lastly the Atharva-Veda 'says' "*Ayam Atma Brahma*" or "This self is Brahman.'

D : Father, the soul is confined to the body, and is subject to pains and sorrows. How can it be identical with the infinite spirit which is all bliss?

F : It is a mistake to suppose that the soul is in the body. On the other hand it is truer to say that the body is in the soul. The body is enveloped and pervaded by the soul which is infinite, all pervading and eternal. The body is like a vessel, and the soul is like the space within it and without it. When the vessel is moved from place to place, the space within it is not moved. When the contents of the vessel are boiled, the space or ether in it is not boiled. Similarly, there is in us something uncreated, something higher than all our faculties, something untouched by sin or suffering. The Gita, quoting from *Kathopanishad*, says: "It is said that the senses are great, but greater than the senses is the mind, and greater than the mind is the understanding, but what is even greater than the understanding is He."

D : The soul is subject to birth and death, while the eternal spirit is not. How can both be identical?

F : Birth is only the union of the soul with the body, and death the separation from it. The soul in itself is eternal. It is not born, nor does it die.

D : What happens to the soul after it is separated from the body? Does it become one with the universal soul?

F : It cannot become one with the universal soul till all its *upadhis* are removed. And I have already said that death removes only one of the *upadhis*, namely, the gross body. But there is still the subtle body, and there is the acquired merit or demerit which determines its next birth.

D : When are these also removed?

F : They are removed only when the soul qualifies itself for moksa or salvation.

D : You say that the soul is ultimately identical with God. What new qualifications has it to acquire?

F : The soul is identical with God. But it is subject to *upadhis* on account of its *avidya*. These prevent it from realising its identity. The soul need not, strictly speaking, acquire new qualifications. It has only to remove its disqualifications. For salvation, being of the nature of eternity, is not something that is made, but something that is only realised.

D : How is this *avidya* removed?

F : It is removed by *vidya* or *jnana*. *Avidya*, as we have seen, consists in our imagining that we are separate from one another and separate from God. All our sin and suffering are due to this *ajnana* or false notion. The individual soul has to learn to transcend its individuality.

D : How is this done?

F : By righteousness, by love and by spiritual insight a man has to go out of himself and feel the oneness of all beings in God. This feeling should become an abiding possession. Then the scales fall from his eyes, the vision of God comes to him, and he realises the truth of the *mahavakyas* of the *Sruti*.

D : Is it not enough if he constantly meditates on the identity taught by the *mahavakyas*?

F : Can an exiled king get back his kingship by shutting his eyes and thinking "I am the king. I am the king."? No. He should marshal his scattered forces, win over allies, and conquer his enemies, and come into his own. Similarly, we should subdue our selfishness, conquer our passions, love the God that is within us and realise that He is present in all creatures. In fact, we should traverse the three ascents of works, worship and wisdom that I have been describing to you in these talks. The *Samyak-darsana* or the true and full vision, which gives us *moksa*, is to be had only on the summit of the third ascent.

D : When a man does not live to reach the summit, but dies on the way either in the first or the second ascent, what happens to his soul? Is all his effort lost? And does he perish?

F : In reply to a similar question put by Arjuna to Krishna in the Gita, the latter says: "Neither in this world nor in the next, O Arjuna, would he perish. For a man who does good, my dear, will never come to grief."

D : But what happens to Him?

F : Our scriptures describe two paths for the dead—the *Pitryana* and the *Devayana*. Those who fall and die in the first ascent which I described have to come back into the world of time and change. They take birth in surroundings suitable to their further progress. In other words, their past *karma*, good and bad, determines for them their environment, such as country, nation, class, parentage etc. This path is the *Pitryana*. Those who fall and die while scaling the second ascent never come back into the time process. They never take birth again.

D : Do they obtain *moksa*?

F : No. They are not yet qualified for *moksa*, for *moksa* comes only after the *Samyak-darsana* of the third ascent. But their further progress is ensured in a world of spirit which is called *Brahma-loka*. There they live with more than human faculties in the presence of the God whom they

worshipped on earth. And finally they attain *mukti*. This path is the *Devayana*; and, as the *mukti* reached along this path is gradual, it is called *kramamukti*.

D : Why is there such a difference between the fate of those who fall in the first ascent and that of those who fall in the second ascent? Why do the former come back into this dark world of ours and the latter go to the bright world of *Brahma-loka*?

F : It is because works, however virtuous they may be, do not involve a total effacement of the self. Morality exalts and purifies an individual, but he still remains an individual. His virtues and vices have a hold over him. But, as we have seen, the very essence of *moksa* consists in an individual breaking down the walls of his separation. Therefore a man, who dies before this is done, has naturally to return to this world of space and time, that is, of individuality and exclusion. But in the religious worship of the second ascent the individual takes refuge in the object of his worship and totally forgets himself. Therefore his virtues and vices have no hold over him. He is in the hands of God whose grace leads him into a higher world and prepares him for *moksa*. Hence his path is different from that of the man who dies in the first stage.

D : What is the state of the soul after it attains *moksa*?

F : I have already said that *moksa* means the awakening of the soul into divine life and coming into its own. So the state of such a soul is the same as that of the Divine Being. Let me quote passages from the Veda which describe that state :

"He who verily knows the Supreme Brahman becomes Brahman."

"As the flowing rivers in the ocean
Disappear, quitting name and form,

So the knower, being liberated
from name and form,

Goes unto the heavenly Person,
higher than the high."

There are, of course, differences of opinion among teachers of the *Vedanta* about the correct interpretation of these passages, as about almost all the subjects we have been discussing today. We are following Samkara now, and presently we shall come back to the views of the other teachers.

D : Father, can a man attain *moksa* while remaining in this body?

F : There is nothing to prevent it, my child. Such a person is called a *Jivanmukta*. By the *Samyak-darsana* that he obtains on the summit of the third ascent, the effects of his former *karma* are all destroyed except the small fraction of *prarabdha karma* which has come to fruition in the present body. He remains in the body till the effects of this are over. As his present actions are the outcome, not of his selfish desire, but of his union with God, they bear no seeds of future lives; and as his present devotions are the outcome, not of any great gulf between him and God, but of an enlightened self-knowledge, they need no further life of probation. So a *Jivanmukta* acts in the world and worships God, but he is absolutely free. That is the teaching of the *Sruti* and the *Smriti*. Samkara, in a famous passage in his *Sutra-Bhasya*, gives us a hint of his own personal experience in this matter. He says: "It is not a matter for dispute at all whether the body of a *Brahmavit*, or one who has realised Brahman, continues to exist for some time or not. For how can a man contest another's heartfelt conviction that he has realised Brahman although he continues to have a bodily existence?

D : Father, what is the sort of life that a *Jivanmukta* leads ?

F : How can I describe it in a few words ? The whole of the *Bhagavad Gita* may be looked upon as an exposition of this character. For a *Jivanmukta* is a perfect Yogin. He possesses, on the one hand, an unclouded experience of the

absolute reality of Brahman, and of the identity of his own self with it, and, on the other, the consciousness of the relative character of all that is different from it, namely, the world, his own body and the other *upadhis* of the soul. He has, of course, no pains nor sorrows, no fears nor desires. He is far above the pitiful pleasures of this world. Sin can never approach him, and he has no need to make an effort to be virtuous. He has no need of prayers either. For he feels the holy presence of God in him constantly, and life is no mystery to him. Scriptures are superfluous to him, for they have all fulfilled their object. The *Veda* itself says of such a man, "To him the *Veda* is no *Veda*." So he becomes a real *Svarat* or one who has attained to the perfect spiritual freedom of God. His soul lives on the heights of divine peace and joy. But he voluntarily works in the world as God works, not for any object of his own, but for the good of others. He takes part in the human drama, not to please himself or the other actors, but the divine stage-manager whose interests are his own. Even after he quits this body he gladly takes up another, if his presence is required in the world. Such is the life of a *Jivanmukta*. All the great saints of the world and the founders of religions that have profoundly influenced the history of humanity are, more or less, *Jivanmuktas*. The aim of all our studies, of all our mental and moral disciplines, and of all our spiritual endeavours is only to develop in course of time this type of character.

D : Father, you said there were differences of opinion among Hindu teachers about the third ascent. May I know what they are ?

F : There are three important schools of *Vedanta*—the *Advaita* of Samkara, the *Visistadvaita* of Ramanuja and the *Dvaita* of Madhva.

D : How do these differ from one another ?

F.: There are considerable differences with regard to the four chief topics we discussed today, namely, God and His creation, and the soul and its salvation. The view that I have so far given is that of Samkara's *Advaita*. I will now give you a short account of Ramanuja's *Visistadvaita*, from which you will see how his teaching differs from Samkara's.

According to Ramanuja, the Absolute is not impersonal but a personality endowed with all the glorious qualities we know of, such as knowledge, power and love. So God is *saguna* only, and not *nirguna*. The Vedic texts, which deny qualities to Him, should be interpreted as meaning that He has no such lower qualities as sorrow, change, mortality etc. The difference that is necessary for the idea of the personality of God exists in Himself. For He has two inseparable *prakaras* or modes, namely the world and souls. These are related to Him, as the body is related to the soul. They have no existence apart from Him. They inhere in Him as attributes in a substance. But they have two phases—the subtle phase and the manifest phase, according as God is in His *karana-avastha* i.e. causal state, or *karya-avastha* i.e. effected state. The former is the state before creation, and the latter after creation.

Creation is an act of God by which souls and matter undergo transformations. Matter is fundamentally real and it undergoes a real *parinama* or evolution, and not simply an apparent variation. Even after *pralaya* or dissolution matter exists, as in the beginning, in a subtle state as the *prakara* of God. Therefore it is eternal, though ever dependent.

The soul is a higher *prakara* of God than matter, because it is a conscious entity. It is also eternally real and eternally distinct from God and eternally dependent on Him. It is as uncreated as matter, creation only meaning in this case the expansion of intelligence and the acquisition of a material body according to the degree of merit acquired in a previous existence. Moreover the soul is ever atomic (*anu*) in size

dwelling in the heart like a point of light and therefore distinct from God who is all-pervasive (*vibhu*). There are three classes of souls—*nitya*, *mukta* and *baddha*. To the first class belong those who are eternally free and who live with God in Vaikuntha, His supreme abode. To the second class belong those who were once subject to *samsara* but who have now acquired salvation and live with God. And to the third class belong those who are still in the meshes of *samsara* and who are striving to be saved.

Salvation can be obtained only by the grace of God responding to the call of *bhakti* and *prapatti* or self-surrender on the part of the worshipper. *Karma* and *jnana* are only means to *bhakti*. The released souls attain to the nature of God and never lose their individuality, they are only released from *samsara*. And this release comes only after quitting the body, for, according to Ramanuja, there is no such thing as *Jivanmukti*.

D : Father, will you please let me know the specific points of difference between Samkara's system and Ramanuja's system ?

F : From the brief account of the *Visistadvaita* that I have just now given, you will see that it differs from the *Advaita* in the following points :

(*i*) To Ramanuja God is always personal endowed with various perfections. But to Samkara God is both personal and supra-personal. In relation to the world He is conceived as being endowed with various perfections, but in Himself He is really different from anything we can conceive.

(*ii*) To Ramanuja the world is absolutely real, being an inseparable *prakara* or mode of God. But to Samkara the world is only relatively real. It is real to the individual soul only so long as its individuality lasts.

(*iii*) To Ramanuja the *jiva* or individual soul is also absolutely real and eternally distinct from God, though God, being omnipresent, dwells in it. But to Samkara, on the other hand, the *jiva* is only relatively real, its individuality lasting only so long as it is subject to *upadhis* or limiting conditions.

(*iv*) To Ramanuja *moksa* is freedom from *samsara*. But to Samkara it is freedom not only from *samsara* but also from exclusive individuality and its corollary, the conception of a phenomenal world.

(*v*) To Ramanuja *karma* and *jnana* are only means to *bhakti* which gives *moksa*. But to Samkara *karma* and *bhakti* are means to *jnana* which is *moksa*.

D: And how does the *Dvaita* differ from these?

F: The *Dvaita* philosophy of Madhva has many points in common with the *Visistadvaita* of Ramanuja. To Madhva, as to Ramanuja, there are three eternal entities fundamentally different from one another—God, the soul and the world. Of these God is a *svatantra* or an independent reality, and the other two are *paratantras* or dependent realities. He does not create them, but only rules them. To Madhva, as to Ramanuja, God is a person whose grace is necessary for the salvation of the worshipper. Like Ramanuja, Madhva identifies God with Vishnu living in Vaikuntha along with His consort Lakshmi, who is the personification of His creative power. God manifests Himself through various *vyuhas* or forms and *avatars* or incarnations. He is also the *antaryamin* or the inner controller of all souls. And, lastly, to Madhva, as to Rmanuja, souls are of atomic size and are of three kinds—*nitya*, *mukta* and *baddha*. These are the points of agreement.

D: But what are the points of difference?

F: Madhva differs from Ramanuja in the following points:

(*i*) Madhva does not admit that the world is the body

of God. According to him God is only the efficient cause of the world, and not the material cause. The distinction between God and the world of matter and souls is absolute and unqualified. That is why his system is called *Dvaita* or dualism. Whereas Samkara's system which denies any such ultimate distinction is called *Advaita* or monism; and Ramanuja's system, which maintains the distinction but also emphasizes the oneness of the Absolute, is called *Visistadvaita* or qualified monism.

(*ii*) Madhva holds that, though every atom of space in the universe is filled with *jivas*, no two *jivas* are alike in character. They are essentially different from one another and belong to different grades even in their enjoyment of bliss after salvation.

(*iii*) Madhva further classifies the souls that are still bound to the wheel of *samsara* into three classes : (*i*) those who, being of *Sattvika* nature, are pre-ordained for salvation; (*ii*) those who, being of *Rajasa* nature, are pre-ordained to wander for all time in the labyrinth of Samsara; (*iii*) and those who, being of *Tamasa* nature, are pre-ordained to suffer in eternal darkness.

(*iv*) Madhva holds that souls cannot get salvation except through a mediator who gives them the saving knowledge. This mediator is *Vayu*, the son of Vishnu.

(*v*) But, my child, these are rather subtle differences, which are bound to arise in the bosom of a religion which is singularly free from rigid dogmas and which encourages rather than discourages freedom of opinion. They are of little practical importance. They do not stand in the way of men perfecting their lives through righteousness, love and worship in accordance with the main teaching of our

scriptures. It is therefore enough for you to confine yourself to matters on which all our teachers are agreed.

D: Will you kindly tell me what the points are on which all are agreed?

F: All Hindu religious teachers are agreed in thinking:

(*i*) That the spiritual experience embodied in the *Sruti* is our ultimate authority in religion, and not mere individual reason;

(*ii*) That God is one though He has many names and forms, and that He is an ineffable perfection;

(*iii*) That all men find themselves in this life in the toils of *samsara* in accordance with their own past *karma*;

(*iv*) That there is a triple path consisting of *karma*, *bhakti* and *jnana* which can lead men out of *samsara* to the perfection of God;

(*v*) That he who would be saved should cultivate the virtues of purity, self-control, detachment, truth and *ahimsa* in their various forms and become a *Dharmatma*;

(*vi*) That he has further to worship his *Ishta-devata* according to his *adhikara*, and, by every means in his power, acquire the grace of God;

(*vii*) And that his salvation consists in his being free from the cycle of births and deaths and gaining entrance into the world of spirit.

These are things that really matter. They are the teachings that fill our lives with hope and give a meaning and content to all our struggles here against ignorance and sin.

VI

D : Father, have you done ?

F : Yes, my child, I have. I hope the account I have given you of the three ascents of the path of light will enable you to lead a complete spiritual life of virtue, devotion and insight. It is only for purposes of instruction that I have made the three ascents separate from one another. In truth, long before you reach the top of the first ascent you are on the second, and long before you reach the top of the second you are on the third. Spiritual life is one. It is made up of the three elements of *karma*, *bhakti* and *jnana* that vary in their proportions according to the temperament of the striving soul.

Now, my task is over. I have given you a short account of the essentials of a religion which, though it is the oldest in the world, is as vigorous today as any other religion, and which is professed by 220 millions of men, a considerable part of the human race. Incidentally, I have also pointed out that Hinduism is neither fatalism nor pessimism, neither asceticism nor quietism, neither agnosticism, nor panthesism, neither illusionism nor mere polytheism, as some of its hasty critics have represented it to be. It is a synthesis of all types of religious experience, from the highest to the lowest. It is a whole and complete view of life. That is why it has stood like a rock all these thousands of years and survived the attacks of the followers of all the other great religions of the world. It has survived the Buddhist schism of ancient times, the Muslim oppression of mediaeval times, and the Christian propaganda of modern times. And today in the twentieth century, it is again in one of its periods of Renaissance. It looks ahead and sees a glorious future before it. No wonder, therefore, that the Hindus call their religion *sanatana dharma* or eternal order, and are justly proud of it. Dull must he be of soul indeed whose pulse does not throb when he reads the history of Hindu civilization extending over more than forty centuries, and takes into account its achievements in social

organization as well as literature and art. No doubt this civilization has had its reverses. It has its sins—many grievous sins —to answer for. Which civilization has not ? Let us frankly admit every one of them and try to put our house in order. Let us march on, and make our future worthy of our past. It is with this hope that I have endeavoured to show to you, and, through you, to the youth of India, the steel-frame that lies behind all the bewildering castes and sects of Hinduism.

D : Father, I know your enthusiasm. But you are rather forgetting yourself. You don't remember whom you are addressing. You don't see where I stand.

F : Why, my dear ? Are you standing on a precipice ? But, seriously, my child, my words are as applicable to you as to any other Hindu girl or boy. Perhaps they are more applicable to you. For you have never cared very much for the glittering toys of the world that generally attract people of your age. You have never cared for ornaments or fine clothes. You love only books and friends. You are in the habit of reading much, far above what is expected of you. I hope you will continue that habit throughout life, and, in the numerous years before you, see for yourself what beautiful forms Hinduism exhibits in the lives of good men and women in India. I hope also that your own life will fulfil the promise that it is holding out now, and make you worthy of the sacred name you bear.

D : As God wills !

F : Yes, my dear. As God wills ! There is no religion higher than that.

APPENDICES

I
THE AGE OF THE MANTRAS

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
1. The Aryans in the Punjab.	The worship of the gods of heaven, air and earth through prayer and sacrifice.	Rg. Veda Samhita — which is divided into ten mandalas.	The limestone figures and terracottas representing animals, and various kinds of seals recently discovered at Mohanjo-Daro and Harappa in the Indus valley are supposed to be specimens of Indo-Sumarian art.	Madhuchandas Grtsamada Visvamitra Atri Bharadvaja
2. Their contests with the aboriginal inhabitants.	Varuna is the great god of cosmic and moral order.		The Vedic Aryans were proficient in building houses, constructing chariots and making vessels of ayas for domestic and ritual use.	Vasista
3. Contests among their own tribes.	Indra is the god of power.		They had gold jewellery.	
4. The Bharatas and the Purus are the most prominent tribes.	The unity of all the gods and of the universe is asserted.		They were acquainted with different kinds of musical instruments—vina, vana, dundubhi etc.	
			They recognized dancing as an art.	

II
THE AGE OF THE BRAHMANAS

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
1. The Aryans move eastward from the Punjab.	*Elaborate sacrifices occupy the centre of national life.*	The Veda is divided into Rk. Sama and Yajus.	Progress in the knowledge of metals—tin, lead and silver as well as ayas.	Aitareya. Sandilya.
2. The centre of their life is now the Gangetic Doab.	A very complex ritualism requiring a special class of priests is developed.	The beginnings of Vedangas or accessories to the study of the Veda.	Exact sciences and national arts begin to arise from the building of the sacrificial altar.	Pippalada.
3. The Kurus and the Panchalas are the most prominent tribes.	Vishnu and Rudra become important deities.	Elaborate ritualistic treatises called the Brahmanas are produced—the chief of which are Aitareya Satapatha, Tandya and Taittiriya.		
4. The Van civilisation begins to penetrate into the Dekkan and Bengal.		Atharva Veda which is a collection of ancient charms and spells is recognised as a part of the Veda.		

III
THE AGE OF THE UPANISHADS

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
1. All Northern India Aryanised.	The highest truths of Hinduism are discovered and taught.	The principal Upanishads that form the basis of Hindu philosophy.	The Brahmi script of forty-six letters, arranged on a strictly scientific method, is developed.	Janaka Yajnavalkya Sanatkumara
2. Aryanization of the South begun.	The Upanishads emerge out of the widespread religious and philosophical quest of the time.	The nucleus of the Ramayana and of the Mahabharata.	Excavations at Lauriya and Taxila show progress in stone-cutting, stone-polishing, bead-making etc.	Agastya Kapila Valmiki
3. Numerous small kingdoms and republics established all over Aryavarta.	The beginnings of Jainism and Buddhism.	The grammers of Yaska and Panini.	The statues of Ajata Satru and other kings of Sisunaga dynasty.	Vyasa
4. Maritime and overland trade with Persia, Babylon, Egypt and Greece is carried on.			Punch-marked coins are introduced.	Parsva Gosala
5. The rise of the Kingdom of Magadha to a position of great power towards the close of this period under kings of Sisunaga dynasty.				Mahavira Buddha
6. The death of Buddha brings this period to a close.				

IV

THE AGE OF THE SUTRAS (480 B.C.—185 B.C.)

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
1. The end of the Sisunaga dynasty in Magadha about 400 B.C.	The Vedantas are systematized.	Sutra Literature. (i) Srauta Sutras. (ii) Sulva Sutras (iii) Grhya Sutras. (iv) Dharma-Sutras. (v) Kama-Sutras.	The reliefs of Surya and Indra at Bhaja.	Gautama Apastambha Asvalayana
2. The establishment of the Nanda empire which included the greater part of Northern India.	All knowledge and usage systematized into aphorisms called Sutras.	Kautilya's Artha-Sastra.	The chaityas of the early Andhras.	Bhadrabahu Chandragupta
3. The invasion and retreat of Alexander the Great (327 B.C. 325 B.C.)	Buddhism comes into great prominence under Asoka.	Pali literature. (i) Vinaya Pitaka. (ii) Sutta Pitaka with Jataka tales. (iii) Abhidhamma Pitaka	The primitive paintings on the walls of Jogimara cave in Ramagarh Hill.	Kautilya
4. The famous Mauryan Empire established by Chandragupta (322 B.C.)	Buddhist missionaries are sent to all parts of India, Ceylon, Burma, Syria and Egypt.	The Edicts of Asoka.	The early Jain caves at Udayagiri in Orissa.	Asoka
5. The defeat of Seleucus.	The Pali canon of Buddhism is fixed by the councils of Vaisali and Pataliputra.		The Asokan pillars with the capital of lotus surmounted by a lion or a bull.	

IV

THE AGE OF THE SUTRAS (480 B.C.—185 B.C.)—(*Contd.*)

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
6. The glorious reign of Asoka (273 B.C. -232 B.C.)	Bhadrabahu carries Jainism to the South.	—	The profuse sculptural reliefs of Barhut, Sanchi and Bodhi-Gaya.	
7. The end of the Mauryan Rule (180 B.C.)	The development of Vaisnavism and Saivism in the Hindu fold.	—	Die-struck coins are introduced.	
8. Andhra, Chera, Chola, Pandya and other kingdoms flourish in the Dekkan and the South.				

V
THE AGE OF EPICS (185 B.C.—320 A.D.)

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
1. The Indian frontier harassed by the Bacterian Greeks, Parthians, Sakas and Kusans.	The Hindu Renaissance after the fall of the Mauryan Empire.	The Smritis of Manu and Yajnavalkya.	The sculptures of Gandhara and Mathura Schools.	Manu Gautama
2. The famous Empire of Kanishka in N.W. India with Peshawar as Capital.	The ancient laws codified and the social system organized.	The philosophical sutras of the various Darsanas.	The sculptures of Amaravati and Sanchi.	Kanada Jaimini
3. Sunga and Kanva dynasties rule in Magadha.	The six schools of philosophy clearly distinguished.	Patanjali's Mahabhasya.	The sculptural and architectural remains of Anuradhapura in Ceylon.	Badarayana Kanishka
4. The Satavahana Empire in the Dekkan.	The old stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata enlarged and popularized.	Bharata's Natyasastra	The temple of Bodhi-Gaya.	Asvaghosa Nagarjuna
5. The supremacy of Chera, Chola and Pandya Kingdoms in Southern India.		The laws of Vasishta and Parasara.	The monasteries of Nasik and Karle.	Satakarni
		The didactic epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.	Ajanta paintings of Caves IX and X.	Kharavela

V
THE AGE OF EPICS (185 B.C.—320 A.D.)—(*Contd.*)

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
	The spread of Buddhism in China, Eastern Turkistan and Persia.	The works of Charaka and Susruta.	A high level of music among the Tamils.	Cheran Sanguttuvan
	Jainism spreads to Gujarat.	Buddhist Literature: (*i*) Lalita Vistara (ii) Saddharma Pundarika (*iii*) Nagasena's Milinda Panha. (*iv*) Asvaghosa's Buddhacarita. (*v*) Aryasura's Jatakamala.	Coins of Hellenistic model introduced.	Karikala Chola.
6. The beginnings of the Pallava power.				
	Digambara and Svetambara sects clearly separated in Jainism.	The Jain Angas		
		Prakrt Literature : (*i*) Kural (*ii*) Manimekhalai (*iii*) Silappadikaram (*iv*) The Samgam works.		

VI
THE AGE OF THE PURANAS (320 A.D.—650 A.D.)

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
1. The great Gupta Empire during fourth and fifth centuries.	The popularization on a vast scale of the Hindu religious ideals through the Puranas.	The eighteen great Puranas edited.	The classical sculptures of : (i) The cave temples on Udayagiri hills. (ii) The temples of Deogarh Garhwa, Bagh and Aurangabad. (iii) The reliefs of Badami and Ajanta Caves. (iv) The composition known as Arjuna's penance in Mamallapuram.	Samudragupta Chandragupta-I (Vikramaditya) Yashodharman Sasanka
2. The Vakatakas and the early Chalukyas in the Dekkan.	Congregational worship organized and temples built.	The famous dramas of Bhasa, Kalidasa, Sudraka and Harsha.	The frescoes of Ajanta, Bagh and Srigiriya.	Pulakesin
3. The Pallavas become the masters of South India.	The beginnings of Vaishnava and Saiva revival in the South.	Bharavi's Kiratarjuniya.	The cave temples of Badami and Pattadakal.	Harsha
4. The Huna invasions are checked by the Maukhari kings and by Yasodharman in the 6th century.	Hinduism and Buddhism carried by Indian colonists to Cambodia, Sumatra Java and Bali.	The works of Bhartrhari.	The development of successive styles of Pallava architecture in South India.	Narasimha Varman Kalidasa Bana

VI
THE AGE OF THE PURANAS (320—650)—(*Contd.*)

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
5. The rise of two powerful kingdoms —that of Thaneswar under Harsha and that of Bengal under Sasanka—in N. India at the beginning of the seventh century.	Buddhism makes progress in Khotan, Central Asia, Korea, Japan and Tibet.	The poetics of Bhamah and Dandin.	The Pallava cave architecture of Trichinopoly and of Chengalpat Dist.	Bhartrhari
6. Nalanda University was founded.	Streams of Buddhist teachers go to China from India; and Chinese pilgrims visit India.	The prose romances of Subandhu and Bana.	The great iron pillar now at Delhi.	Santi Deva
				Asanga
	Innumerable Buddhist texts translated into Chinese.	The mathematical and astronomical treatises of Aryabhata, Varahmihira and Brahmgupta.	The colossal copper statue of Buddha now at Birmingham.	Dinnaga Bodhidharma
	The Jains active in Tamil and Canarese countries.	The Silpa-Sastras and other scientific treatises.	The most artistic gold coinage with Sanskrit inscriptions in the Gupta period.	Buddhaghosa Dharmakirti Jnanasambandhar
	Syrian Christian community formed in Travancore.	Buddhist Literature: (*i*) The commentaries of Buddhaghosa. (*ii*) The great Mahayana works of Santi Deva and Asanga. The works of Kundakunda in Jain literature. Tevaram in Tamil literature.		Appar Sundarar.

N. B. "At this time India was the dynamic centre of all Asia and the first civilised power in the whole world."
—*A. Coomaraswamy..*

VII
THE AGE OF THE AGAMAS AND VEDANTA SCHOOLS (650-120)

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
1. The rise of the Kingdom of Kashmir in the eighth Century under Lalitaditya.	Philosophic Hinduism systematized by the great Acaryas Samkara, Ramanuja and Nilakantha.	Pancaratra Samhitas, Saiva, Agamas and Tantra Manuals popularized.	The sculptures of Rajamahal, Bhuvaneswar, Konark and Puri.	Yasovarman. Lalitaditya
2. The rise of Rajput kingdoms.	Popular Hinduism reorganized into sects.	The commentaries of Samkara, Ramanuja and Nilakantha.	The sculptures in the cave temples of Ellora and Elephanta.	Rajendra Chola. Vikramaditya.
3. The great Ghurjara empire in N.W. India	The remarkable development of Saktism.	Bhagavata Purana and Devi Bhagavatam.	The wonderful Buddhist sculptures of Borobunder in Java.	Kumari.
4. The powerful Pals Kingdom in Bengal.	Saivism flourishes in Kashmir.	The Dramas of Bhavabhuti, Rajasekhara etc.	The temples of Tanjore and Gangaikonda Cholapuram.	Prabhakar. Gaudapada.
5. The Rashtrakuta and the later Chalukya kingdoms in the Dekkan.	Large bodies of foreigners taken into the Hindu fold and assimilated.	The Kavyas of Bhatti and Magha.	The famous bronzes (Nataraja etc.) of South India and Ceylon.	Mandana Mishra. Samkara. Yamuna.
6. The later Cholas become the overlords of S. India in the eleventh century.	The rise of the Bhakti Schools in the South.	Jayadeva's Gita Govinda.	The bronzes statuettes of Nepal and Tibet.	Ramanuja. Nilakantha. Vacaspati Mishra.
	Tantric Buddhism flourishes in Nepal, Bengal, Assam, etc.	The works of Kalhana and Bilhana.	The colossal Jain statues of Sravana Belgola and Karkal.	Udayana.

VII

THE AGE OF THE AGAMAS AND VEDANTA SCHOOLS (650-1200)—(*Contd.*)

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
	8. Jainism flourishes and produces most abundant and varied literature.	The works of Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta.	The Chalukya architecture in Mysore.	Dipamkara Hemachandra Manikkavasagar.
		Dhanamjaya's Dasarupa.		Nammalwar.
		Vijnanesvara's standard legal work—Mitakshara.		
		The works of the great Jain scholar—Hemachandra.		
		Tamil Literature :		
		(*i*) Nalayira Prabhandham.		
		(*ii*) Tiruvacakam.		
		(*iii*) Kamba Ramayana		
		(*iv*) Sekkilar's Periya Puranam.		

VIII

THE AGE OF THE LATER BHAKTI SCHOOLS (1200-1750)

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
1. The piecemeal conquest of India by *Muslim* invaders.	The various schools of Hinduism hardened into sect.	The Vedic commentaries of Sayana.	Sculpture declines.	Ramananda Kabir
2. The establishment of the Afghan Empire and later of the Moghul Empire.	Castes become rigid and exclusive under religious persecutions and foreign domination.	Adhyatma Ramayana	The Vijayanagar school of architecture is seen at its zenith in Madura, Rameswaram, Srirangam, etc. with great gopurams and pillared halls.	Chaitanya Nanak
3. The decline of the Rajput power.	The conservation of Hindu culture in S. India.	Sukra Nitisara.	The early Indo-Mussalman school of architecture in Delhi, Jaunpur, Ahmedabad and Bijapur.	Tulsi Das Guru Govind
4. The rise and fall of the great Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar.	Saiva Siddhanta and Vira Saivism established in the South.	Sahitya Darpana and Siddhanta Kaumudi.	The later Indo-Mussalman or Moghul school of architecture in Delhi, Agra (Tajmahal), Lahore and other places.	Shivaji Krishna Deva Raya
5. The rise of the Maharatta power.	The great Bhakti Schools of Ramananda, Vallabha, Chaitanya and Madhva rise into prominence.	Sarnga Deva's Sangitaratnakara which is the greatest authority on music.	The portrait-paintings of the Moghul school.	Madhva Vidyaranya
6. The rise of the Sikhs.	Buddhism is absorbed.	The works of Mdhusudana Sarasvati	Three Rajput schools of paintings.	Vedanta Desika

VIII

THE AGE OF THE LATER BHAKTI SCHOOLS (1200-1750)—(*Contd.*)

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
7. The beginnings of European penetration and influence.	Jainism declines.	The rise of vernacular literature in N. India.	Introduction of minor arts like filigree, enamelling and carpet weaving.	Appayya Dikshita Jagannatha Panditaraja
		(*i*) The lyrics of Vidyapati.		
		(*ii*) The songs of Mira Bai.		Madhusudana Sarasvati
		(*iii*) Tukaram's Abhanga.		
		(*iv*) Kabir's Bijak		
		(*v*) Dadu's Bani		
		(*vi*) Nabha Das's Bhaktamala.		
		(*vii*) The works of Sur Das		
		(*viii*) The famous Ramayana of Tulsi Das.		Tayumanavar
		(*ix*) The Adi-Granth		

VIII

VIII. THE AGE OF THE LATER BHAKTI SCHOOLS (1200-1750)—(*Contd.*)

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
8. The supremacy of the Portuguese in the 16th century and of the Dutch in the 17th century in Indian waters.	Many Hindus converted by force to Islam.	The Mahabharata translated into Bengali, Telugu, Canarese and Malayalam.		Pattinattu Pillai
	Muslim influence is seen in the works of Kabir, Nanak and Dadu.	The classical periods of Telugu and Canarese literature.		

IX
THE AGE OF INDIAN RENAISSANCE

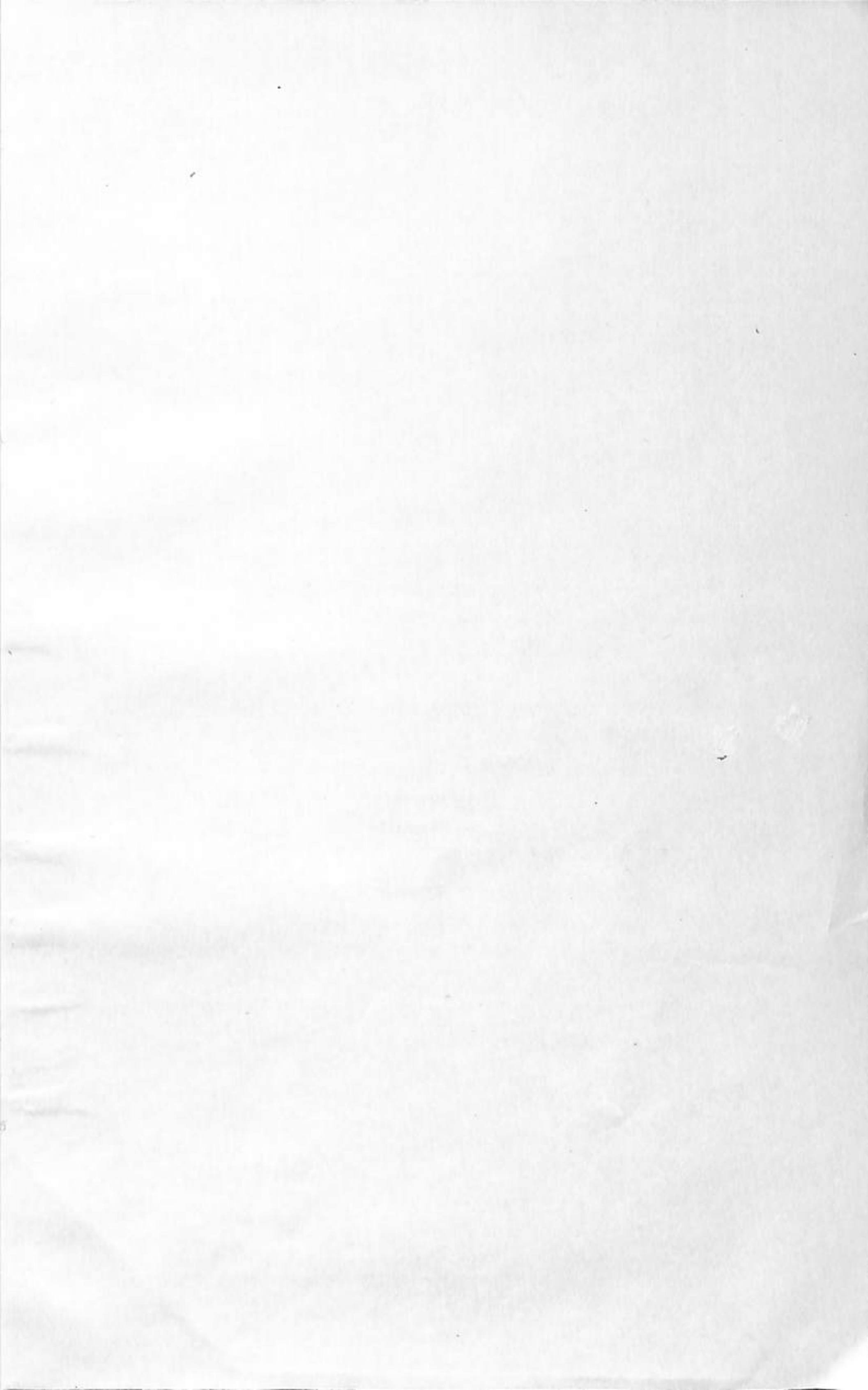
	History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
1.	The British conquer India by overthrowing the Maharattas and the Sikhs.	No internal development of Hinduism in this period.	Nothing of first rate importance is produced in any language.	Almost all indigenous arts languish and die owing to lack of patronage and even of appreciation.	Ramalinga Swami. Ram Mohun Roy.
2.	The great Sepoy Mutiny and the transfer of power from the East India Co. to the British Crown.	The intellectual classes seek secular employment under British Govt.	A number of digests of the old Smritis are produced in accordance with local customs, by : (*i*) Kamalakara (*ii*) Vaidika Sarvabhauma (*iii*) Vaidyanatha Dikshita. (*iv*) Ellayaji.	Many great works of art disappear owing to ignorance and carelessness of local inhabitants; and many are carried away by the curio-hunters of Europe and America.	Dayananda Saraswati. Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar.
3.	The Queen's Proclamation.	Christian Missions attack the excrescences of Hinduism.	The rise of vernacular prose in all languages.	The works of the musical composers Tyagaraja and Sama Sastri in South India.	Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. Swami Vivekananda
4.	A uniform law, administration and coinage introduced throughout India.	Social reformers try to remedy the evils in Hindu society.	The works of Bankim Chandra Chatopadhyaya in Bengal.		
5.	Peace and security of person and property established throughout the country.	Great Orientalists introduce the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures to the mind of Europe.	The hymns of Ramalinga Swami in S. India.		Devendra Nath Tagore.

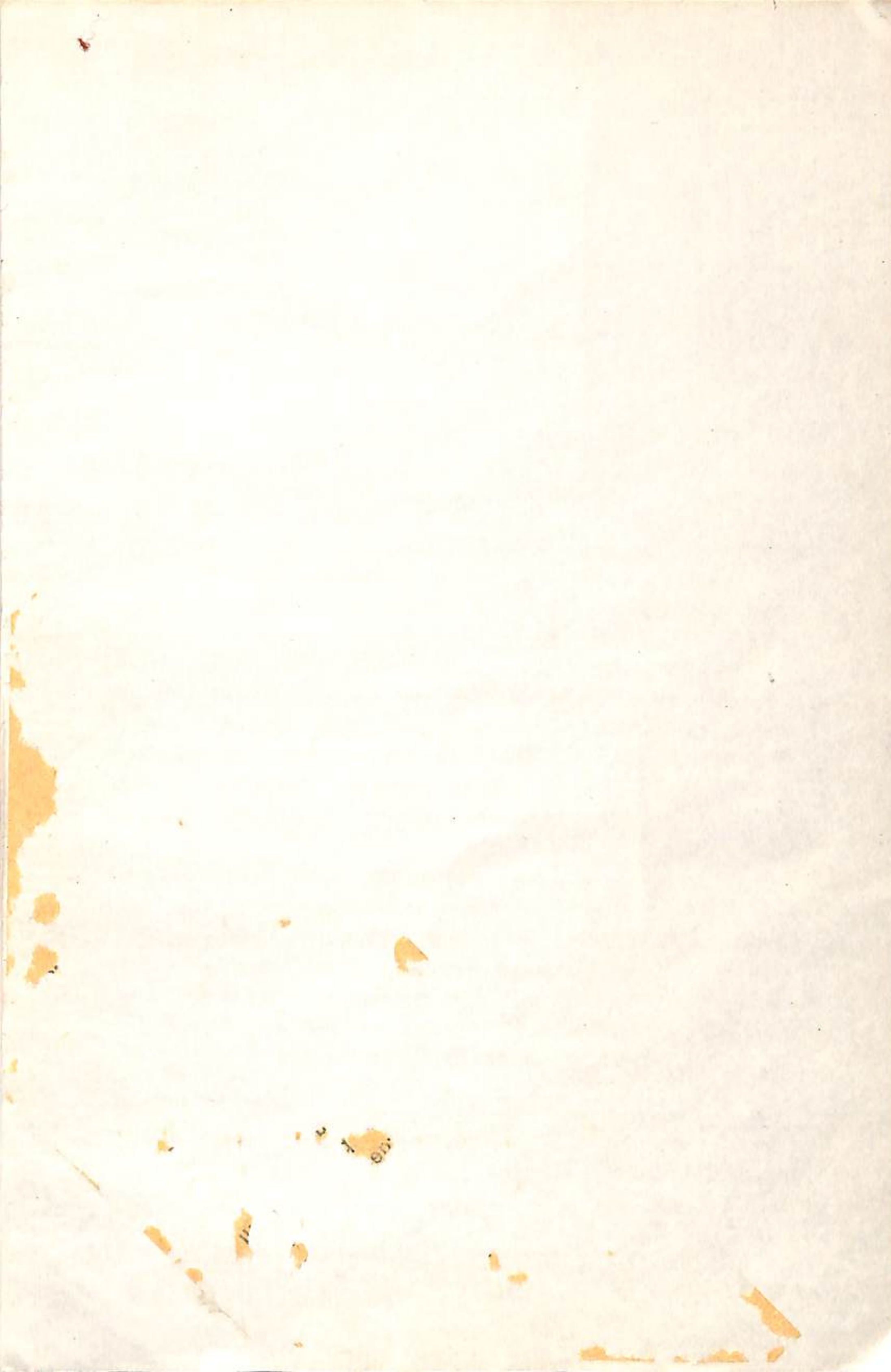
IX

THE AGE OF INDIAN RENAISSANCE—(*Contd.*)

History	Religion	Literature	Arts	Great Men
6. New Universities founded for imparting western education.	The influence of western *civilisation* results in the rise of Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society in the 19th century.			
7. The rise and growth of the Indian National Congress.	The dawn of a new era seen at last in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and of Swami Vivekananda.			
8. The inrush of a totally different civilisation puts an end to all creative work in this period.				
9. An uncritical admiration of all things western infects the Indian mind for a time.				

N.B. :—The beginning of the National awakening in the early years of the 20th century.







THE AUTHER

Born in 1883, Professor D. S. Sarma, scholar and educationist, had his education in the Madras Christian College, from which he graduated in 1904. Subsequently he took his M. A. degree in English Language and Literature in 1909. Starting life in Government service at the Kumbakonam College, he went over to the Presidency College, Madras, in 1913, where he remained on the English staff for twentytwo years. After a short spell of service as the principal of the Government Arts College, Rajahmundry, he retired from Government service in 1938. After retirement he served as the Principal and professor of English in two private colleges in Madras—Pachaiyappa's College and Vivekananda College. He retired from the latter in 1949.

He has a number of books on Hinduism to his credit. Notable among them are *The Tales and Teachings of Hinduism*, *Essence of Hinduism*, *Hinduism through the Ages* and *The Hindu Standpoint*. His English translation of the Gita has gone into seven editions and his *Lectures and Essays on the Gita* into four. Among his other books mention may be made of *Lalita Sahasranama*, *The Prince of Ayodhya*, *Gandhi Sutras*, *The Father of the Nation*, *The Upanishads—An Anthology*, etc.